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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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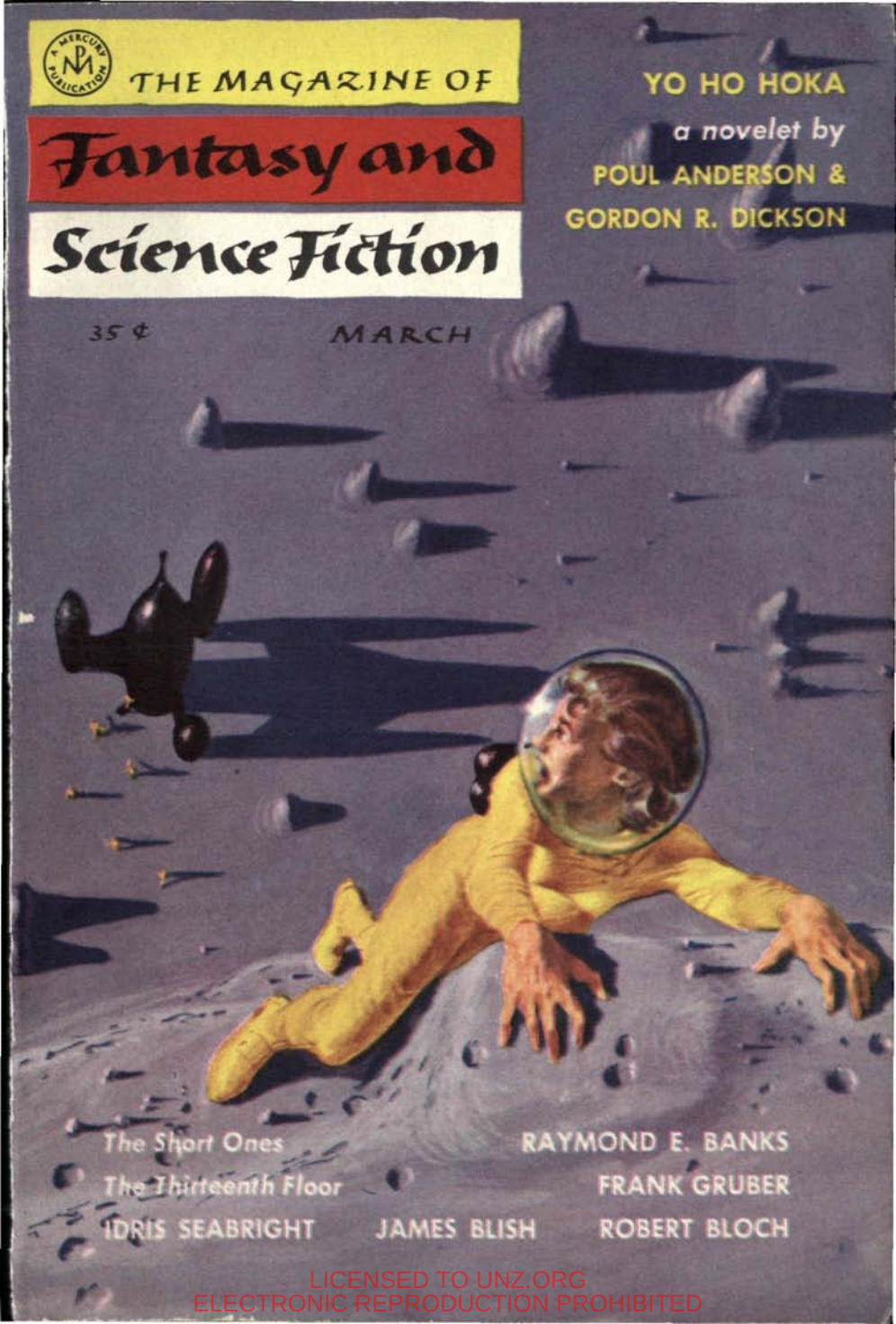
YO HO HOKA
a novelet by
POUL ANDERSON &
GORDON R. DICKSON



The Short Ones — RAYMOND E. BANKS
The Thirteenth Floor — FRANK GRUBER
IDRIS SEABRIGHT — JAMES BLISH — ROBERT BLOCH

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 3 MARCH

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Time, in the history of science fiction, is (like the time of the Short Ones in this story) curiously speeded up and condensed. Such young and relatively new writers as Poul Anderson, Richard Matheson, Chad Oliver and Robert Sheckley seem by now like well-established Old Hands; and already there is an even younger and newer generation of creators. (Personally, I feel that I entered the field rather late — as recently as 1941; but I suppose I must appear a very graybeard. . . .) Of this latest generation, one of the most promising, to my mind, is Raymond E. Banks, a part-time politico of Manhattan Beach, California, who here studies the politics of the future — politics in Washington, and the religio-politics of a strange microcosm which can shape — or annihilate — the vast world above it.

The Short Ones

by RAYMOND E. BANKS

VALSEK CAME OUT OF HIS HUT AND looked at the sky. As usual it was milk-white, but grayed down now to pre-dawn somberness.

"Telfus!"

The sleepy face of his hired man peered over a rock, behind which he had slept.

"We must plow today," said Valsek. "There'll be no rain."

"Did a god tell you this?" asked Telfus, a groan in his voice.

Valsek stumbled over a god-wire before he could answer. Another exposed god-wire! Important things were stirring and he had to drive this farm-hand clod to his labor.

"If you are to sleep in my field and eat at my table, you must work," said Valsek angrily. He bent to examine the god-wire. The shock to his hands told him there was a feeble current running in it which made his magnetic backbone tingle. Vexing, oh vexing, to know that current ran through the wire and through you, but not to know whether it was the current of the old god Melton, or the new god, Hiller!

"Bury this god-wire at once," he told Telfus. "It isn't neat to have the god-wires exposed. How can I make contact with Hiller when he can see my fields unplowed and my god-wires exposed? He will not choose me Spokesman."

"Did this Hiller come to you in the night?" asked Telfus politely.

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"In a way, in a way," said the prophet testily. It was hard to know. It was time for a new god, but you could miss it by weeks.

Valsek's wife came over the hill, carrying a pail of milk warm from the goat.

"Was there a sign last night?" she asked, pausing before the hut.

Valsek gave his wife a cold stare. "Naturally there was a sign," he said. "I do not sleep on the cold stone of the barn floor because it pleases my bones. I have had several portents from Hiller."

His wife looked resigned. "Such as?"

Short Ones! Valsek felt contempt inside of him. All of the Short Ones were fools. It was the time for a new god, and they went around milking goats and asking about signs. Short Ones! (And what god had first revealed to them that name? And why, when they were the tallest living beings in all the world?)

"The wind blew last night," he said.

"The wind blows every night," she said.

He presented his hard conviction to the cutting blade of her scorn.

"About midnight it rained," he persisted. "I had just got through suggesting rain to the new god, Hiller."

"Now was that considerate?" asked Telfus, still leaning on his rock. "Your only hired hand asleep in the fields outside and you ask for rain."

"There is no Hiller," said Valsek's wife, tightening her lips. "It rains every midnight this time of year. And there will be no corn if you keep sleeping in the barn, making those stupid clay images and avoiding work."

"Woman," said Valsek, "god-business is important. If Hiller chooses me for Spokesman to all the Short Ones we shall be rich."

But his wife was tired, perhaps because she had had to pull the plow yesterday for Telfus. "Ask Hiller to send us a bushel of corn," she said coldly. "Then I will come into the barn and burn a manure stick to him."

She went into the hut, letting the door slam.

"If it is permitted to sleep in the barn," said Telfus, "I will help you fashion your clay idols. Once in King Giron's courtyard I watched an artist fashion a clay idol for Melton, and I think I might have a hand for it, if it is permitted to sleep in the barn."

Blasphemers! Worldly blasphemers! "It is not permitted to sleep in the barn," said Valsek. "I have spent many years in the barn, reaching out for each new god as he or she came, and though I have not yet made contact, it is a dedicated place. You have no touch for prophecy."

"I have seen men go mad, each trying to be picked Spokesman to the gods for the Short Ones," said Telfus. "The chances are much against it. And consider the fate of

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the Spokesman once the year of his god is over."

Valsek's eyes flashed angrily. "Consider the fate of the Spokesman in his prime. Power, rich power in the time of your god, you fool, if you are Spokesman. And afterwards many Spokesmen become members of the Prophets' Association — with a pension. Does life hold more?"

Telfus decided not to remind his employer that usually the new Spokesman felt it necessary to execute the old Spokesman of the used-up god.

"Perhaps it is only that my knees are too tender for god-business," he said, sighing against the rock.

"Quiet now," said Valsek. "It is time for dawn. I have asked Hiller for a portent, to show his choice of me as Spokesman. A dawn portent."

They turned to watch the dawn. Even Valsek's wife came out to watch, for Valsek was always asking for a dawn portent. It was his favorite suggestion to the gods.

Dawn came. There was a flicker of flashing, magic lights, much, much faster than the slow flame of a tallow taper that the Short Ones used for light. One-two-three-four-five, repeated, one-two-three-four-five. And then the day was upon them. In an instant the gray turned to milk-white and the day's heat fell.

"Ah!" cried Valsek. "The dawn light flashed six times. Hiller is the new god. I am his Spokesman! I must hurry to the market place in town with my new idol!"

Telfus and the wife exchanged looks. Telfus was about to point out that there had been only the usual five lights of dawn, but the wife shook her head. She pointed a scornful finger to the horizon where a black pall of smoke lingered in the sky.

"Yesterday there were riots," she said. "Fighting and the burning of things. If you take your new idol to the market place, you will insult either the followers of King Giron or the followers of Melton. One or the other, they will carve your heart out, old man!"

But it was no use. Valsek had rushed back into the barn to burn a manure-stick to Hiller and start his journey, on the strength of the lights of dawn.

Valsek's wife stared down at her work-stained hands and sighed. "Now I suppose I should prepare a death-sheet for him," she said.

"No," said Telfus wearily picking up the harness from the ground. "They will only laugh at him and he will live forever while you and I die from doing the world's work. Come, Mrs. Valsek, assume the harness, so that I may walk behind and plow a careful furrow in his fields."

Time: One month earlier . . . or half an hour.

Place: The Pentagon, Washington, D. C.

The Life Hall.

In the vast, gloomy auditorium the scurryings and scuttlings of the

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Short Ones rose to a climax beneath the opaque, milky glass that covered the colony. Several spectators rose in their seats. At the control panel, Charles Melton also rose.

"The dials!" cried his advisor.

But Melton was past tending the dials. He jerked the control helmet off his head a second too late. A blue flash from the helmet flickered in the dark room. Short circuit!

Melton leaned over the glass, trying to steady himself, and vomited blood. Then a medical attendant came and escorted him away, as his advisor assumed the dials and his helmet.

A sigh from the spectators. They bent and peered at Melton from the seats above his level, like medical students in an operating theatre. The political career of Charles Melton was over: he had failed the Life Hall Test.

A technician tapped some buttons and the lighted sign, visible to all, changed:

TEST 39167674
HILLER, RALPH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, USA.
TEST TIME: 6 HOURS
OBJECTIVE: BLUE CERTIFICATE TO PROVE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES.
ADVISOR: DR. CYNTHIA WOLLRATH

Cynthia Woolrath!

Ralph Hiller turned from the door of the Ready Room and paced. What rotten luck he was having! To begin with, his test started right after some inadequate Judge-applicant had failed badly and gotten the Short Ones all upset. On top of that, they had assigned his own former wife to be advisor. How unethical can you get?

He was sure now that his enemies in the administration had given him a bad test position and picked a prejudiced advisor to insure his failure — that was typical of the Armstrong crowd. He felt the hot anger on his face. They weren't going to get away with this. . . .

Cynthia came into the Ready Room then, dressed in the white uniform of the Life Hall Staff, and greeted him with a cool, competent nod.

"I'm rather surprised that I've been given a prejudiced advisor," he said.

"I'm sorry. The Board considered me competent to sit in on this test."

"Did you tell them that we were once married?"

She sighed. "No. You did that in at least three memorandums, I believe. Shall we proceed with the briefing?"

"The Board knows you dislike me," he said. "They know I could lose my sanity in there. You could foul me up and no one would be the wiser. I won't stand for it."

Her eyes were carefully impartial. "I don't dislike you. And I rather think that the Board chose me because they felt that it would help you out. They feel I know your personality, and in something as dangerous as the Life Hall Tests they

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try to give all the applicants a break."

"My father died in that chair," he said. "My uncle —"

"You aren't your father. Nor your uncle. Shall we start? We're late. This is a Short One —"

She held up a figure, two inches high, a perfectly formed little man, a dead replica of the life below. In her other hand she held a metal sliver that looked like a three-quarter-inch needle. "The Short Ones are artificial creatures of living protoplasm, except for this metallic backbone imbedded in each. It is magnetic material —"

"I want a postponement."

"Bruce Gerard of the *Times* is covering this Test," she said patiently. "His newspaper is not favorable to the Administration. He would like to report a postponement in a Life Hall Test by an important Administration figure. Now, Ralph, we really must get on with this. There are many other testees to follow you to the chair."

He subsided. He held his temper in. That temper that had killed his father, almost destroyed his uncle. That temper that would be put to the most severe test known to men for the next few hours. He found it difficult to concentrate on her words.

"— wires buried in the ground of the Colony, activate the Short Ones — a quarter of a million Short Ones down there — one of our minutes is a day to them — your six hours of testing cover a year of their lives —"

He knew all that. A Blue Certificate Life Hall Test was rather like an execution and you studied up on it long before. Learned how science had perfected this tiny breed. How there had been opposition to them until the beginnings of the Life Hall. In today's world the Short Ones protected the people from inefficient and weak leaders. To hold an important position, such as his Cabinet job, you had to have a Life Hall Certificate. You had to prove out your leadership wisdom over the roiling, boiling generations of Short Ones before you could lead mankind. The test was rightfully dangerous; the people could expect their leaders to have true ability if they passed the test, and the false leaders and weaklings either never applied, or were quickly broken down by the Short Ones.

"Let's go," said Cynthia.

There was a stir from the audience as they entered the auditorium. They recognized him. Many who had been resting with their spectator helmets off reassumed them. A wave of tense expectancy seemed to come from them. The people knew about the failure of his father and his uncle. This looked like a blood test and it was fascinating to see a blood test.

Ralph took his position in the chair with an inward sigh. It was too late now to change anything.

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He dare not embarrass the Administration before a hostile reporter. He let Cynthia show him the inside of the Director's helmet with its maze of wires.

"Since their time runs so fast, you can't possibly read out each and every mind of the Short Ones down there," she said. "You can handle perhaps half a dozen. Step-down transformers will allow you to follow their lives. They are your leaders and representatives down in the world of the Short Ones.

"These knob hand dials are your mechanical controls down there. There are hydraulic linkages which give you power to change the very seas, cause mountains to rise and valleys to form. Their weather is in your control, for when you think of weather, by an electronic signal through the helmet, you cause rain or sun, wind or stillness. The left hand dial is destructive, the right hand dial is constructive. As the current flows throughout the system, your thoughts and wishes are impressed upon the world of the Short Ones, through your leaders. You can back up your edicts by smashing the very ground under their feet. Should you desire to kill, a flick of the dial saturates the magnetized backbone of the unfortunate Short One, and at full magnetization all life ceases for them.

"Unfortunately, you are directing a dangerous amount of power in this system which courses within a fraction of an inch of your head in the control helmet. At each death down there a tiny amount less current is needed to control the Short Ones. At many deaths this wild current, no longer being drawn by the dead creatures, races through the circuits. Should too many die, you will receive a backlash of wild current before I can —"

Ralph nodded, put on the helmet and let the scurryings and scuttlings of the Short Ones burst in on his mind.

He sat straight, looking out over a sheet of milky glass fifty feet across that covered the world below. He was sinking mentally into their world. With him, but fully protected, the spectators put on their helmets to sink into the Colony and witness the events below as he directed them.

The eerie light from the glass shone on the face of the medical attendant standing ready.

Ralph reached out his hands to start his test and gave himself a final admonition about his temper. At all costs he must curb it.

There is a temper that destroys and also one that demands things done by other men. Ralph had used his sternness well for most of the years of his life, but there had been times, bad times, when that fiery temperament had worked against him.

Like his marriage to Cynthia, ten years before. She had had a cool, scientific detachment about life which had attracted him. She had

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been a top student of psychology on the campus. At first her cool detachment had steadied him and enabled him to get started in his political career. But then it began to haunt him — her reasonableness against his storms; he had a growing compulsion to smash through her calmness and subjugate her to his will.

He had hurt her badly once.

He still felt the flame of embarrassment when he remembered her face in the bedroom, staring down at the nakedness of the other woman, staring at his own nakedness, as the adulterers lay on her bed, and the shivery calmness of his own nervous system at the expected interruption. And his words across the years:

"Why not? You seem to be sterile."

Foolish, hot ego of youth. He had meant to stir and shock a very proper Cynthia, and he had done so. Her moan of rage and hurt had made him for that triumphant moment the flamethrower he was destined to be.

He hadn't counted on a divorce, but then it was impossible for him to give up his victory. He was Ralph Hiller, a man who asked no favors —

Ah, that was ten years ago when he was barely twenty-five! Many times since the divorce he'd wished for her quiet calmness. She had stayed in the arms of science, never marrying again, preferring the well-lighted lab to the dark halls of passion. But such an act could rankle and burn over the years. . . .

The affairs of the Short Ones pressed impatiently on him, and he turned to his job with unsteady nerves.

When Valsek appeared, towing his clay idol of Hiller on a handcart, the soldiers were too drunk to be cruel to him. They merely pricked his buttocks with their swords and laughed at him. And the priests of Melton, likewise sated with violence, simply threw stones at him and encouraged the loiterers to upend the cart and smash the grinning nonentity of clay. Hiller indeed! Would a new god creep into their lives on a handcart pulled by a crazy old man? Go away, old man, go away.

Back at the farm Valsek found Telfus finishing up a new idol.

"You knew?" he asked sadly.

"It was somehow written in my mind that you would need a new idol," said Telfus. "I am quite enthusiastic about this new god, and if I may be permitted to sleep in the barn, I am sure that I would get the feel of him and help you do good works in his name."

"It is not permitted to sleep in the barn," grunted Valsek, easing his tender backside on a haypile. "Also I take notice that the plowing has stopped."

"Your wife fainted in the fields," said Telfus. "I could not bring myself to kick her back to consciousness as you ordered because I have a bad leg from sleeping on the ground. I have slept on the ground many,

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many years and it is not good for the leg."

The fire of fanaticism burned in Valsek's eyes. "Bother your leg," he said. "Place my new idol on the handcart; there are other towns and other ears to listen, and Hiller will not fail me."

In a short time Valsek had used up several of the idols to Hiller in various towns and was required to rest from the injuries given him by the scornful priests, the people and the soldiers.

"When I beg," said Telfus, "I place myself before the door of a rich man, not a poor one. Would it not be wisdom to preach before King Giron himself rather than the lesser figures? Since Melton is his enemy, the King might welcome a new god."

"You are mad," said Valsek. "Also, I do not like your latest idols. You are shirking on the straw which holds the clay together. I suspect you of eating my straw."

Telfus looked pained. "I would not dream of eating Hiller's straw," he said, "any more than I would dream of sleeping in the barn without permission. It is true, however, that your wife and goat occasionally get hungry."

Valsek waved a hand. "Prepare a knapsack. It has occurred to me that I should go to the very courtyard of the King himself and tell him of Hiller. After all, does a beggar beg at the door of a poor man?"

Telfus nodded. "An excellent idea, one I should've thought of."

"Prepare the knapsack," ordered Valsek. "We will go together."

At the gate of the Palace itself, Telfus stopped. "Many Short Ones have died," he said, "because in the midst of a hazardous task they left no avenue of escape open. Therefore I shall entertain the guards at the gate with my juggling while you go on in. Should it be necessary for you to fly, I will keep the way open."

Valsek frowned. "I had planned for you to pull the idol-cart for me, Telfus, so that I might make a better impression."

"An excellent idea!" said Telfus. "But, after all, you have the company of Hiller, which is worth a couple of regiments. And I have a bad leg, and Hiller deserves a better appearance than to be pulled before a King by a limping beggar. Therefore I will remain at the gates and keep the way open for you."

Valsek took the cart rope from Telfus, gave him a look of contempt, and swept into the courtyard of King Giron.

King Giron, who had held power for more than a year now, stared out of his lofty bedroom window and listened to the words of Valsek carried on the wind from the courtyard below, as he preached to the loiterers. He turned white; in just such a fashion had he preached Melton the

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previous year. True, he no longer believed in Melton, but, since he was writing a bible for the worship of King Giron, a new god didn't fit into his plans. He ordered the guards to bring the man before him.

"Make a sign, old man," he directed. "If you represent a new god, have him make a sign if, as you say, Melton is dead and Hiller is the new god."

Valsek threw himself down and groveled to Hiller and asked for a sign. He crooned over Telfus' latest creation, asking for a sign. There was none. Ralph was being careful.

"But Hiller lives!" cried Valsek as the guards dragged him upright and King Giron smiled cynically. "Melton is dead! You can't get a sign from Melton either! Show me a sign from Melton!"

The two men stared at each other. True, Melton was gone. The King misdoubted that Melton had ever existed, except in the furious fantasies of his own mind which had been strong enough to convince other people. Here now was a test. If he could destroy the old man, that would prove him right — that the gods were all illusion and that the Short Ones could run their own affairs.

The King made a cutting sign across his own throat. The guards threw Valsek to his knees and one of them lifted a sharp, shining blade.

"Now cut his throat quickly," ordered the King, "because I find him a very unlikely citizen."

"Hiller," moaned Valsek, "Hiller, I've believed in you and still do. No you must save me, for it is the last moment of my miserable life. Believe in me, Hiller!"

Sweat stood out on Ralph's brow. He had held his temper when the old man had been rejected by the others. He had hoped for a better Spokesman than this fanatic, but the other Short Ones were confused by King Giron's defiance of all gods and Valsek was his only active disciple. He would have to choose the old man after all, and, in a way, the fanatical old man did have spirit. . . . Then he grinned to himself. Funny how these creatures sneaked into your ego. And deadly, no doubt!

The sword of the guard began to descend. Ralph, trying hard to divine the far-reaching consequences of each act he would perform, made his stomach muscles grip to hold himself back. He didn't mean to pass any miracles, because once you started it became an endless chain. And this was obviously the trap of the test.

Then King Giron clapped his hands in glee and a particle of Ralph's anger shot through the tight muscles. His hand on the dial twitched.

The sword descended part way and then hung motionless in the air. The guards cried out in astonishment, as did Ralph up above. King Giron stopped laughing and turned very white.

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"Thrust this man out of the gate," he ordered hoarsely. "Get him out of my sight."

At the gate Telfus, who had been watching the miracle as open-mouthed as the soldiers, eagerly grasped the rope of the handcart and started off.

"What has become of your sore leg?" asked Valsek, relaxed after his triumph.

"It is well-rested," said Telfus shortly.

"You cannot maintain that pace," said Valsek. "As you said this morning, it is a long, weary road back home."

"We must hurry," said Telfus. "We will ignore the road." His muscles tensed as he jerked the cart over the bumpy field. "Hiller would want us to hurry and make more idols. Also we must recruit. We must raise funds, invent insignia, symbols. We have much to do, Valsek. Hurry!"

Ralph relaxed a little and looked at Cynthia beside him. Her fair skin glowed in the subdued light of the Hall. There was a tiny, permanent frown on her forehead, but the mouth was expressionless. Did she expect he would lash out at the first opposition to his control? He would show her and Gerard and the rest of them . . .

They called Valsek the Man the King Couldn't Kill. They followed him wherever he went and listened to him preach. They brought him gifts of clothes and food which Telfus indicated would not be unpleasing to such a great man, and his wife and servant no longer had to work in the fields. He dictated a book, *Hiller Says So*, to Telfus, and the book grew into an organization which rapidly became political and then began to attract the military. They made his barn a shrine and built him a mud palace where the old hut had stood. Telfus kept count with manure sticks of the numbers who came, but presently there weren't enough manure sticks to count the thousands.

Throughout the land the cleavage grew, people deciding and dividing, deciding and dividing. If you didn't care for King Giron, you fell under the sway of Hillerism. But if you were tired of the strange ways of the gods, you clung to Gironism in safety, for this new god spoke seldom and punished no one for blasphemy.

King Giron contented himself with killing a few Hillerites. He was fairly certain that the gods were an illusion. Was there anything more wonderful than the mountains and trees and grass that grew on the plains? As for the god-wires, they were no more nor less wonderful, but to imagine they meant any more than a tree was to engage in superstition. He had once believed that Melton existed but the so-called signs no longer came, and by denying the gods — it was very simple — the miracles seemed to have ceased.

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True, there was the event when the guard had been unable to cut Valsek's throat, but then the man had a history of a rheumatic father, and the coincidence of his frozen arm at the proper moment was merely a result of the man's natural weakness and the excitement of the occasion.

"We shall let the Hillerites grow big enough," King Giron told his advisors. "Then we shall march on them and execute them and when that is done, the people will understand that there is no god except King Giron, and we shall be free of godism forever."

For his part, Valsek couldn't forget that his palace was made of mud, while Giron's was made of real baked brick.

"Giron insults you!" cried Valsek from his barn-temple to Hill. "His men have the finest temples in the city, the best jobs, the most of worldly goods. Why is this?"

"Giron represents order," Ralph directed through his electronic circuits. "It is not time to upset the smoothness of things."

Valsek made an impudent gesture. "At least give us miracles. I have waited all my life to be Spokesman, and I can have no miracles! The priests who deserted Melton for you are disgusted with the lack of miracles. Many turn to the new religion, Gironism."

"I don't believe in miracles."

"Fool!" cried Valsek.

In anger Ralph twisted the dial. Valsek felt himself lifted by a surge of current and dashed to the floor.

"Thanks," he said sadly.

Ralph shot a look at Cynthia. A smile, almost dreamy, of remembrance was on her lips. Here comes the old Ralph, she was thinking. Ralph felt himself tense so hard his calf-muscles ached. "No more temper now, none," he demanded of himself.

Giron discovered that his *King's Book of Worship* was getting costly. More and more hand-scribes were needed to spread the worship of Gironism, and to feed them he had to lay heavier taxes on the people. He did so. The people responded by joining the Hillerites in great numbers, because even those who agreed with Giron about the illusory existence of the gods preferred Hiller's lower tax structure. This angered the King. A riot began in a minor city, and goaded by a determined King Giron, it flowered into an armed revolt and flung seeds of civil war to all corners of the land.

Telfus who had been busy with organizational matters hurried back to the mud palace.

"I suspect Hiller does not care for war," he said bitterly. "Giron has the swords, the supplies, the trained men. We have nothing. Therefore would it not be wise for us to march more and pray less — since Hiller expects us to take care of ourselves?"

Valsek paced the barn. "Go hide behind a rock, beggar. Valsek fears no man, no arms."

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"But Giron's troops are organizing —"

"The children of Hiller need no troops," Valsek intoned.

Telfus went out and stole, begged or borrowed all of the cold steel he could get. He began marching the men in the fields.

"What — troops!" frowned Valsek. "I ordered against it."

"We are merely practicing for a pageant," growled Telfus. "It is to please the women and children. We shall reenact your life as a symbol of marching men. Is this permitted?"

"You may do that," nodded Valsek, appeased.

The troops of Giron came like a storm. Ralph held out as he watched the Gironists destroy the homes of the Hillers, deflower the Hiller women, kill the children of Hillers. And he waited. . . .

Dismayed, the Hillerites fell back on Valsek's bishophric, the mud palace, and drew around the leader.

Valsek nervously paced in the barn. "Perhaps it would be better to kill a few of the Gironists," he suggested to Ralph, "rather than wait until we are dead, for there may be no battles in heaven."

There was silence from above.

The Gironist troops drew up before the palace, momentarily stopped by the Pageant Guards of Telfus. You had to drive a god, thought Valsek. With a sigh, he made his way out of the besieged fortress and presented himself to the enemy. He had nothing to offer but himself. He had brought Hillerism to the land and he alone must defend it if Hiller would not.

King Giron smiled his pleasure at the foolish old man who was anxious to become a martyr. Was there ever greater proof of the falseness of the gods? Meekly Valsek bowed before the swords of King Giron's guardsmen.

"I am faithful to Hiller," said Valsek, "and if I cannot live with it, then I will die for it."

"That's a sweet way to go," said King Giron, "since you would be killed anyway. Guards, let the swords fall."

Ralph stared down at the body of Valsek. He felt a thin pulse of hate beating at his temples. The old man lay in the dust murdered by a dozen sword wounds, and the soldiers were cutting the flesh from the bones in joy at destroying the fountainhead of Hillerism. Then the banners lifted, the swords and lances were raised, the cry went down the ranks and the murderous horde swept upon the fotress of the fallen Valsek. A groan of dismay came from the Pageant troops when the Hillerites saw the severed head of Valsek borne before the attackers.

Ralph could hardly breathe. He looked up, up at the audience as they stirred, alive to the trouble he was in. He stared at Cynthia. She wet her lips, looking down, leaning forward. "Watch the power load," she whispered; "there will soon be

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many dead." Her white fingers rested on a dial.

Now, he thought bitterly, I will blast the murderers of Valsek and uphold my ego down there by destroying the Gironists. I will release the blast of energy held in the hand of an angry god —

And I shall pass the critical point and there will be a backlash and the poor ego-destroyed human up here will come screaming out of his Director's chair with a crack in his skull.

Not me!

Ralph's hands felt sweaty on the dials as he heard the far-off cries of the murders being wrought among the Hillerites. But he held his peace while the work was done, stepping down the system energy as the Short Ones died by the hundreds. The Hillerites fell. They were slaughtered without mercy by King Giron. Then the idols to Hiller were destroyed. Only one man, severely wounded, survived the massacre.

Telfus . . .

That worthy remembered the rock under which he had once slept when he plowed Valsek's fields. He crept under the rock now, trying to ignore his nearly-severed leg. Secure, he peered out on the field of human misery.

"A very even-tempered god indeed," he told himself, and then fainted.

There was an almost audible cry of disappointment from the human audience in the Life Hall above Ralph's head. He looked up and Cynthia looked up too. Obviously human sentiment demanded revenge on the ghastly murderers of King Giron's guard. What sort of Secretary of Defense would this be who would let his "side" be so destroyed?

He noted that Bruce Gerard frowned as he scribbled notes. The Life Hall critic for the *Times*, spokesman for the intellectuals. Ralph would be ticked off proper in tomorrow's paper:

"Blunt-jawed, domineering Ralph Hiller, Assistant Secretary of Defense, turned in a less than jolly Life Hall performance yesterday for the edification of the thoughtful. His pallid handling of the proteins in the Pentagon leads one to believe that his idea of the best defense is signified by the word *refrainment*, a refinement on containment. Hiller held the seat long enough to impress his warmth upon it, the only good impression he made. By doing nothing at all and letting his followers among the Short Ones be slaughtered like helpless ants, he was able to sit out the required time and gain the valuable certificate that all politicos need. What this means for the defense of America, however, is another thing. One pictures our land in ashes, our people badly smashed and the porticoed jaw of Mr. Hiller opening to say, as he sits with folded hands, 'I am aware of all that is going on. You should respect my awareness.' "

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Ralph turned to Cynthia.

"I have under-controlled, haven't I?"

She shook her head. "I am forbidden to suggest. I am here to try to save you from the Short Ones and the Short Ones from you in case of emergency. I can now state that you have about used up your quota of violent deaths and another holocaust will cause the Board to fail you for mismanagement."

Ralph sighed. He had feared over-control and fallen into the error of under-control. God, it was frustrating. . . .

Ralph was allowed a half hour lunch break while Cynthia took over the board. He tried to devise a safe way of toppling King Giron but could think of none. The victory was Giron's. If Giron was content, Ralph could do nothing. But if Giron tried any more violence — Ralph felt the blood sing in his ears. If he was destined to fail, he would make a magnificent failure of it!

Then he was back at the Board beside Cynthia and under the helmet and the world of the Short Ones closed in on him. The scenes of the slaughter remained with him vividly, and he sought Telfus, the sole survivor, now a man with one eye and a twisted leg who nevertheless continued to preach Hillerism and tell about the god who was big enough to let Short Ones run their own affairs. He was often laughed at, more often stoned, but always he gathered a few adherents.

Telfus even made friends with a Captain of Giron's guard.

"Why do you persist in Hillerism?" asked the Captain. "It is obvious that Hiller doesn't care for his own priests enough to protect them."

"Not so," said Telfus. "He cares so much that he will trust them to fall on their knees or not, as they will, whereas the old gods were usually striking somebody dead in the market place because of some fancied insult. I cannot resist this miracle-less god. Our land has been sick with miracles."

"Still you'll need one when Giron catches up with you."

"Perhaps tomorrow. But if you give me a piece of silver for Hiller, I will sleep in an inn tonight and dream your name to him."

Ralph sought out King Giron.

That individual seemed sleek and fat now, very self-confident. "Take all of the statues of Hiller and Melton and any other leftover gods and smash them," ordered the King. "The days of the gods are over. I intend to speed up the building of statues to myself, now that I control the world."

The idols to the King went up in the market places. The people concealed doubt and prayed to him because his military was strong. But this pretense bothered Giron.

"The people cannot believe I'm divine," said King Giron. "We need a mighty celebration. A ritual to prove it. I've heard from a Guard

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Captain of Telfus, this one-eyed beggar who still clings to Hiller. I want him brought to my palace for a celebration. I want the last survivor of the Hiller massacre dressed in a black robe and sacrificed at my celebration. Then the people will understand that Gironism defies all gods and is eternal."

Ralph felt a dryness on the inside of his mouth. He watched the guards round up the few adherents of Hillerism and bring them to the palace. He watched the beginnings of the celebration to King Giron.

There was irony, he thought. Just as violence breeds violence, so non-violence breeds violence. Now the whole thing had to be done over again, only now the insolence of the Gironists dug into Ralph like a scalpel on a raw nerve.

Rank upon rank of richly clad soldiers, proud merchants, laughing Gironists crowded together in the center of the courtyard where the one-eyed man and a dozen of his tattered followers faced death.

"Now, guards," said King Giron, "move out and kill them. Place the sword firmly at the neck and cleave them down the middle. Then there will be twice as many Hillers!"

Cheers! Laughter! Oh, droll, divine King Giron!

Ralph felt the power surging in the dial under his hand, ready but not yet unleashed. He felt the dizzying pull of it, the knowledge that he could rip the flesh apart and strip the bones of thousands of Gironists. The absolute power to blast the conceited ruler from his earth. To smash bodies, stone, sand, vegetation, all — absolute, absolute power ready to use.

And King Giron laughed as the swordsman cleft the first of the beggarly Hillers.

Ralph was a seething furnace of rage. "Go! Go! Go!" his mind told his hands.

Then Cynthia did a surprising thing. "Take your hands off the dials," she said. "You're in a nasty spot. I'm taking over."

His temples throbbed but with an effort he removed his hands from the dials. Whether she was helping him or hurting him, he didn't know, but she had correctly judged that he had reached his limit.

One by one the followers of Hillerism died. He saw the vein along her throat throb, and he saw her fingers tremble on the dials she tried to hold steady. A flush crept up her neck. Participation in the world below was working on her too. She could see no way out and he understood it.

The cruel, fat dictator and his unctious followers, the poor, set-upon martyrs — even the symbol of Telfus, his last follower, being a crippled and helpless man. A situation like this could trigger a man into unleashing a blasting fury that would overload the circuits and earn him revenge only at the cost of a crack in his skull. In real life, a situation of white-hot seething pub-

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lic emotion would make a government official turn to his H-bombs with implacable fury and strike out with searing flames that would wash the world clean, taking the innocent along with the guilty, unblocking great segments of civilization, radioactivating continents and sending the sea into an eternal boil.

And yet — GOD DAMN IT, YOU HAD TO STOP THE GIRONS!

Cynthia broke. She was too emotionally involved to restrain herself. She bit her lips and withdrew her hands from the dials with a moan.

But the brief interruption had helped Ralph as he leaned forward and took the dials in her place. His anger had subsided suddenly into a clear-minded determination.

He thought-waved Telfus. "I fear that you must go," he said. "I thank you for keeping the faith."

"You've been a most peculiar god," said Telfus, warily watching the last of his friends die. His face was white; he knew he was being saved for the last.

"Total violence solves nothing."

"Still it would be nice to kick one of these fellows in the shins," said Telfus, the sweat pouring from his face. "In the natural order of things an occasional miracle cannot hurt."

"What would you have me do?"

Telfus passed a hand over his face. "Hardly a moment for thoughtful discussion," he groaned. He cried out in passionate anguish as his closest friend died. Ralph let the strong emotions of Telfus enter his mind, and then gradually Telfus caught hold of himself.

"Well," he said, "if I could only see King Giron die . . ."

"Never mind the rest?" asked Ralph.

"Never mind the rest," said Telfus. "Men shouldn't play gods."

"How right you are!" cried Ralph.

"Telfus!" cried King Giron. "You see now how powerful I am! You see now that there are no more gods!"

"I see a fool," said Telfus as the guard's sword fell. The guard struck low to prolong the death for the King's enjoyment and Telfus rolled on the ground trying to hold the blood in his body. The nobles cheered and King Giron laughed and clapped his hands in glee. The guards stood back to watch the death throes of Telfus.

But Telfus struggled to a sitting position and cried out in a voice that was strangely powerful as if amplified by the voice of a god.

"I've been permitted one small miracle," he said. "Under Hiller these favors are hard to come by."

There was an electric silence. Telfus pointed his empty hand at King Giron with the forefinger extended, like a gun. He dropped his thumb.

"Bang," he said.

At that moment Ralph gave vent to his pent-up steam of emotions in one lightning-quick flip of the dial of destruction, sent out with a

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prayer. A microsecond jab. At that the earth rocked and there was a roaring as the nearby seas changed the shoreline.

But King Giron's head split open and his insides rushed out like a fat, ripe pea that had been opened and shucked by a celestial thumb. For a second the empty skin and bones stood upright in semblance of a man and then gently folded to the ground.

"Not bad," said Telfus. "Thanks." He died.

It was interesting to watch the Gironists. Death — death in battle or natural death — was a daylight-common thing. Dignified destruction is a human trade. But the unearthly death of the King brought about by the lazy fingering of the beggar — what person in his time would forget the flying guts and the empty, upright skin of the man who lived by cruelty and finally had his life shucked out?

Down below in the courtyard the Gironists began to get rid of their insignia. One man dropped Giron's book into a fire. Another softly drew a curtain over the idol of Giron. Men slunk away to ponder the non-violent god who would always be a shadow at their shoulder — who spoke seldom but when he spoke was heard for all time. Gironism was dead forever.

Up above a bell rang and Ralph jerked up from his contemplation with surprise to hear the rain-like sound, the applause and the approval of the audience in the Life Hall. Even Gerard was leaning over the pressbox rail and grinning and nodding his head in approval, like a fish.

Ralph still had some time in the chair, but there would be no more trouble with the Short Ones. Already off somewhere a clerk was filling out the certificate.

He turned to Cynthia. "You saved me by that interruption."

"You earned your way," she said.

"I've learned much," he said. "If a god calls upon men for faith, then a god must return it with trust, and it was Telfus, not I, whom I trusted to solve the problem. After all, it was his life, his death."

"You've grown," she said.

"We have grown," he said, taking her hand under the table and not immediately letting go.

OBSERVE NATIONAL BROTHERHOOD WEEK

February 20th — 27th

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This is, belatedly, Robert Bloch's first story in F&SF; and I could introduce the author adequately only by writing an essay of such length that we'd have to drop a novelet or so. Bloch has written every type of science-fantasy from screwball farce to Lovecraftian unmentionable slitherings; he's written a little of everything else too, from above-average paperback crime novels to very nearly every witty word that you've read in any American s.f. fanmagazine; and he is, with no exceptions, the best toastmaster in the world. There are many other facets of this sharply chiseled Bloch; but the important one on this occasion is that he's an intensive and acute student of psychology and psychiatry, and has here extrapolated those sciences to predict, with forceful conviction and threatening bite, a new disease of the mind.

I Do Not Love Thee, Doctor Fell

by ROBERT BLOCH

BROMELY COULDN'T REMEMBER WHO had recommended Doctor Fell. The name had popped into his mind (funny, something like that popping *into* his mind at a time when so many things seemed to be popping *out* of it!) and he must have made an appointment.

At any rate, the receptionist seemed to know him, and her "Good morning, Mr. Bromely" had a warm, pleasant sound. The door of the inner office, closing behind him, had a harsh, grating sound. Both seemed oddly familiar.

Bromely sensed the same misplaced familiarity as he gazed around the inner office. The bookshelves and filing cases to the left of the window, the desk to the right, the couch in the corner almost duplicated the arrangement in his own office. This was a good omen, he felt. He'd be at home here. At home. But, *you can't go home again. Home is where the heart is. You have stolen my heart, now don't go 'way. As we sang love's old sweet song on —*

It took a tremendous, conscious effort to pull out of that one, but Bromely did it. He wanted to make a good impression on the Doctor.

Doctor Fell rose to greet him from his chair behind the desk. He was a tall, thin man of about Bromely's age and build, and Bromely received a vague impression that his features were not dissimilar. The subdued

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lighting did not lend itself to a closer scrutiny of the psychiatrist's countenance, but Bromely was aware of a look of purpose and intensity quite foreign to his own face.

The same purpose and intensity drove Doctor Fell around the desk, communicated in his hearty handclasp.

"You're prompt, Mr. Bromely," said Doctor Fell. His voice was deep and low. *Deep and Low. Low and Behold. Behold, Bedad and Begob. Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego, Inc.*

How he got out of that one, Bromely never knew. He was somewhat surprised to find himself on the couch. Apparently he'd been talking to Doctor Fell for quite some time — and quite rationally, too. Yes, he remembered, now. He'd been answering all the routine questions.

Doctor Fell knew that he was Clyde Bromely, age 32, public relations counsel. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania. Parents dead. Business, lousy. No business. No *business like show business, there's no business I know* —

Had he said that? Apparently not, because Doctor Fell's rich, deep, comforting voice moved right along, asking the questions and extracting the answers. And it was quite all right to talk to Doctor Fell, tell him all he knew. Fell was a good psychiatrist.

Bromely knew a little something about psychiatry himself. Oh, not the technical terms of course, but more than a smattering of technique. This was a routine orientation, preliminary to probing. And Bromely cooperated.

When Doctor Fell began to ask questions about his health and his general background, Bromely took a sheaf of papers from his inside coat pocket and handed them over.

"Here it is, Doc," he said. "Complete report on the physical. Had it taken last week." He indicated a second folded sheaf. "And here's the autobiography. All the names you'll need — friends, relatives, teachers, employers, the works. Everything I could remember. Which isn't much, right now."

Doctor Fell smiled in the shadows. "Excellent," he said. "You seem to understand the necessity of cooperation." He put the papers on the desk. "I'll check over this later," he told Bromely. "Although I imagine I'm already familiar with most of the contents."

Bromely got that panicky feeling again. Whoever had recommended Doctor Fell to him must also have talked to Doctor Fell about his case. Now who would that be? He hesitated to ask — not that he felt ashamed, but it would be an admission that he was pretty far gone if he couldn't even recall how he'd come here. Well, it didn't matter. He was grateful to be here, and that was the important thing. He needed Doctor Fell.

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"You've got to help me, Doctor Fell," he was saying. "You're my last hope. That's why I've come to you. You must understand that, because it's the crux of the whole matter. I would never have come to you unless you were my last hope. I'm at the end of my rope. When you come to the end of your rope, you swing. I'm swinging, now. I'm swinging down the lane. Down Memory Lane. I wanted to be a songwriter, once. But my lyrics sounded as if they were stolen. That's my problem. Association. I've got too much association. Everything I do or say sounds like it's stolen from somebody else. Imitation. Mimicry. Until there's nothing original, nothing basic beneath to which I can cling. I'm losing myself. There's no real *me* left."

Bromely went on like this for about an hour. He said everything that came into his mind. The associative clichés poured out, and with them the desperate plea for help.

Doctor Fell scribbled in his notebook and said nothing. At the end of the session he tapped Bromely on the shoulder.

"That'll be enough for today," he said. "Tomorrow, same time? Let's plan on an hour a day, five days a week."

"Then you think you can help me?"

Doctor Fell nodded. "Let's say that I think you can help yourself. Five days a week, from now on."

Bromely rose from the couch. Doctor Fell's face wavered and blurred before him. He was very tired, very confused, but oddly relieved despite the physical strain that affected his vision. There was just one thing bothering him — and suddenly, he remembered it.

"But, Doc, I just happened to think. You know, I'm not doing too well with the business these days and five days a week —"

The hand gripped his shoulder. "I quite understand. But let's put it this way. Your case — your problem, that is — interests me, personally. And even a psychiatrist has been known to extend his services on occasion, without fee."

Bromely couldn't believe his ears at first. "You mean — it won't cost me anything?" His expression of gratitude was genuine. "Doc, you're a real friend. A friend in need. A friend in deed. Indeed."

Doctor Fell chuckled. "Believe me, Mr. Bromely, I *am* your friend. You'll find that out for yourself, in time, I trust."

As Clyde Bromely went out the door he felt the phrases flooding through his brain. *In God we trust, all others pay cash. My best and only friend. A man's best friend is his mother.*

The receptionist said something to him as he left, but Bromely was too preoccupied to catch her words. He was *engrossed in thought*, he was *deep in contemplation, Deep in the Heart of Texas. Death and Texas. Nothing's sure but.*

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The rest of the day passed in a blur. Almost before he realized it, tomorrow had come and he had come and here he was back on the couch.

Doctor Fell listened as he told him about his father and mother, and about the peculiar feeling he now had — the feeling that Doctor Fell reminded him of his father and mother. Brother and sister I have none, but I am my father's only son. Who am I?

"Who are you?" Doctor Fell asked the question, softly. "That's really what's bothering you, isn't it? Who are you? You can answer that question if you want to, you know. So try. Try. Who are you?"

It was the *wrong* question. Bromely felt it, and he froze. Somewhere, deep inside, words formed an answer. But he couldn't find the words. He couldn't find that spot, inside him, where the words came from.

For the rest of the hour he just lay there on the couch.

Doctor Fell said nothing. When the time was up he tapped Bromely on the shoulder, muttered "Tomorrow, then," and turned away.

Bromely got out of the office. The receptionist stared at him oddly, half-opened her mouth to say something, and didn't. Bromely shrugged. Somehow he managed to find his way back to his own office.

He walked in and asked *his* girl for messages. Apparently whatever was wrong with him showed in his appearance, because she did that half-open-mouth trick too. Then she managed to control herself and tell him that CAA had called just a few minutes ago and wanted to see him. There was a chance to handle Torchy Harrigan.

That was the news he'd been waiting for. Bromely snapped out of it, fast. Torchy Harrigan — just signed for a new network video show — two pictures coming up with MGM — big deal with CAA, Consolidated Artists of America — personal representative — press releases to all dailies —

"Call them back and tell them I'm on my way over," he said. "Bromely rides again!"

Bromely was riding again. He was riding the couch in Doctor Fell's office. He was *riding for a fall, riding hell-for-leather* —

And all the while he was talking it out, gasping and sobbing and wheezing and choking it out.

"I can't explain it, Doc. I just can't figure it out! Here I had this deal sewed up with Harrigan, just the kind of setup I've been looking for. Two bills a week and all expenses, a chance to go out to the Coast with him, the works. Even turned out that his business manager is Hal Edwards — good friend of mine, known him for years. He gave Harrigan the pitch on me, built me up.

"So I walked in on Edwards and we talked it over, and then we went up to Harrigan's suite at the Plaza

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to talk it over. And Harrigan gave me the big hello, listened to Hal Edwards pitch for me — greatest flack in the business, all that kind of thing.

"You get the picture, Doc? The whole deal was in the bag. Harrigan was just waiting for me to give him the word on my plan for a publicity campaign. Edwards flashed me the cue and I opened my mouth.

"But nothing came out. You understand me? But *nothing!* I couldn't think of anything to say. Oh, there were words and phrases whirling around in my head, only they didn't add up. I couldn't think like a press agent any more."

All the while he talked, Bromely had been watching Doctor Fell's face. At first it seemed far away, but now it was coming closer and closer, getting bigger and bigger until it blotted out everything.

And Doctor Fell's voice was like distant thunder, then thunder near at hand, thunder overhead.

Vision and hearing played their tricks, but Bromely clung to Doctor Fell, clung to *words that fell from Doctor Fell for he's a jolly good fellow which nobody can deny.*

Doctor Fell had been taking notes in shorthand. He glanced at them now as he spoke. In a moment, Bromely realized he was merely reading off a string of quotes from Bromely's previous conversation. The phrases droned on, louder and louder.

"Can't figure it out . . . sewed up . . . setup . . . two bills a week . . . the works . . . gave Harrigan the pitch on me, built me up . . . big hello . . . greatest flack in the business . . . get the picture . . . in the bag . . . give him the word . . . flashed me the cue . . . but nothing . . . didn't add up."

Doctor Fell leaned forward. "What do those phrases mean to you, Bromely? What do they really *add up* to, in your mind?"

Bromely tried to think about it. He tried hard. But all he could come out with was, "I don't know. They're all slang expressions I used to use in public relations a few years ago. Come to think of it, they're a little dated now, aren't they?"

Doctor Fell smiled. "Exactly. And doesn't that tie in with your final statement, that you couldn't think like a press agent anymore? Isn't that part of your problem, Mr. Bromely — that you aren't a press agent any more, really? That you're losing your identity, losing your orientation? Let me ask you once again, now: *who are you?*"

Bromely froze up. He couldn't answer because he couldn't think of the answer. He lay there on the couch, and Doctor Fell waited. Nothing happened.

Nothing seemed to happen for a long, long time. How Bromely got through the next two days he couldn't remember. All he recalled were the hours on the couch — and it seemed to him that he shuttled back and forth between his

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office and Doctor Fell's more than once a day.

It was hard to check, of course, because he didn't talk to anyone. He lived alone in a one-room walkup apartment and he ate at one-arm counter joints. He wasn't talking to his office-girl, Thelma, any more either. There was nothing to talk about — no calls since the unfortunate Harrigan affair — and he owed her for three weeks' back salary. Besides, she almost seemed afraid of him when he appeared in the office. Come to think of it (and it was so hard to come to think of it, or anything else, so very hard) even Doctor Fell's little receptionist looked frightened when he walked in, without a word.

Without a word. That was his problem. He had no words any longer. It was as though his final effort, talking to Harrigan and Hal Edwards, had drained him dry of the ability to communicate. All the clichés had flowed out of him, leaving . . . nothing.

He realized it now, lying on the couch in Doctor Fell's office. Once more Doctor Fell had asked the single question, the only question he ever asked. "Who are you?"

And he couldn't answer. There was nothing. He was nobody. For years, now, he'd been in the process of becoming nobody. It was the only explanation that fitted. But he couldn't seem to explain.

With a start, he realized that it wasn't necessary. Doctor Fell was sitting close to Bromely now, breaking the long silence, whispering confidentially in his ear.

"All right," he was murmuring. "Let's try a different approach. Maybe *I* can tell you who you are."

Bromely nodded gratefully, but somewhere deep within him, fear was rising.

"Your case is quite remarkable in a way," said Doctor Fell, "but only because it's one of the first. I don't believe it will be the last. Within several years, there'll be thousands of men like you. The schizoids and the paranoids will have to move over and make room for a new category."

Bromely nodded, waited.

"You know anything about disease germs, bacteria? These organisms undergo swift mutations. Men invent sulfa drugs and the germs develop tolerance to sulfa. Men use antibiotics — penicillin, streptomycin, a dozen others. And the bugs adapt. They breed new strains of bugs."

He thinks I'm bugs, Bromely told himself, but he listened. Fell went on, his voice rising slightly.

"Bugs change, but still they spawn on men. And aberration changes with the times, too — but still it spawns on men. Five hundred years ago the commonest form of insanity was belief in demoniac possession. Three hundred years ago men had delusions of witchcraft and sorcery. A man who couldn't integrate his personality created a

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new one — he became a wizard. Because the wizard was the symbol of power, who knew the secrets of Life and Death. The disintegrating personality seeks reaffirmation in Authority. Does that make sense to you?"

Bromely nodded, but actually nothing made sense to him any more. The fear rose within him as Doctor Fell's voice rose without.

"Yes, three hundred years ago, thousands of men and women went to the stake firmly convinced that they were, actually, witches and wizards.

"Times change, Bromely. Look what happened to you. Your personality disintegrated, didn't it? You began to lose touch with reality.

"You lived alone, without personal ties to reaffirm identity. Your work was phony, too — the epitome of all phoniness — manufacturing lies to create artificial press-agent personalities for others. You lived in a phony world, used phony words and phrases, and before you knew it, nothing you did was quite real to you any more. And you got panicked because you felt your sense of identity slipping away. True?"

Bromely felt the fear very close now, because Doctor Fell was closer. But he wanted Doctor Fell to stay, wanted him to solve this problem.

"You're not a fool, Clyde." Doctor Fell used his first name now and it underlined the intimacy of his words. "You sensed something was going wrong. And so you did what others are beginning to do today. You did that which will create, in years to come, a new kind of mania."

The fear was *here*, now. But Bromely listened.

"Some start by seeking the 'self-help' books, just as old-time sorcerers used to study grimoires. Some go further and experiment in all the odd bypaths of parapsychology — ESP, telepathy, occultism. And some go all the way. They cannot conjure up the Devil but they can commune with Freud, with Adler, with Jung and Moll and Stekel and the other archfiends. They don't chant spells any more, but they learn the new Cabala, the new language of Mystery. *Schizophrenia, echolalia, involutional melancholia* — the words come trippingly from the tongue, do they not?

"You should know, Clyde. Didn't you visit the library on those long dull days when business was bad, and read endlessly in psychiatry? Didn't you bury yourself, these past several months, in a completely new world of delusion and hallucination and obsession, of neurosis and psychosis? In other words, when you felt you were going crazy — just as in the past, men felt they were becoming possessed of the Devil — didn't you seek to fight it by studying psychiatry as the ancients studied the black arts?"

Bromely tried to sit up. Doctor Fell's face loomed closer, swung away, loomed closer again.

"You know what happened to

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those men, Clyde. They became, in their own minds, wizards. And you know now — surely you must have guessed — what has happened to you. During the past week, you couldn't be a press agent any more. You couldn't be a rational human being any more. In an effort to project, to invest in a new identity, you became a psychiatrist. And *you invented me!*

"You've told yourself that this office is something like your own office, my receptionist resembles your girl, I resemble you. Don't you understand? This *is* your office. That *is* your girl. You've been coming in daily and lying down here on your own couch. No wonder she's frightened, hearing you talk to yourself. *Now* do you know who you are?"

Was it Doctor Fell or the fear screaming in his ears?

"This is your last chance, Clyde. You've got to decide once and for all. You can be yourself again, completely, if you have faith in your own identity. If not, you're the first of the new maniacs. Let me ask you once again, once and for all: *who are you?*"

Clyde Bromely lay there on the couch while the room whirled and swirled. He saw pictures, endless pictures: a faded snapshot of a little Clyde, clinging to Mamma's skirt — Bromely, Lt. j.g., U.S.N., in uniform — Speed Bromely, public relations, shaking hands with a top comic at a benefit show — Bromely sitting in the public library, seeking the answer in the ologies and the isms — Bromely lying on the couch, clawing at nothing.

Bromely saw the pictures, shuffled them, sorted them, and made his choice.

Then the fear fell away, and Bromely slept. He slept there on the couch for a long, long time. When he woke up it was dark and he was alone in the room. Somebody was rapping on the door.

It was his girl. He knew that now. He was in his own office, and his own girl came in, timidly and hesitantly, as he rose with a smile of renewed confidence,

"I was worried," she said. "You being in here so long, and —"

He laughed, and laughed again inside as he realized that the sound but dimly conveyed the new security he felt within himself.

"I was sleeping," he told her. "There's nothing to worry about, my dear. From now on, we're going places. I've been in a pretty bad slump for the past month or so — someday I'll tell you all about it — but I'm all right now. Let's go out for dinner and we'll make plans."

The girl smiled. She could sense the change, too. Dark as the room was, it seemed to fill with sudden sunlight.

"All right," she said. "All right, Mr. Bromely."

He stiffened. "Bromely? That patient? Don't you know me, my dear?"

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The word golem, *in Hebrew, meant originally anything incomplete or not fully formed: a needle without an eye, a woman who has not conceived . . . or a man without a soul — an automaton. It is in this last meaning that the word occurs so often and so wondrously in Jewish legend that it is familiar even to gentiles; and it may be no accident that modern robotics derives from the Czech author Čapek, since the greatest* golem *of all these robot-precursors was created in Prague.* THE GOLEM *has been the title of at least two classic horror films; Avram Davidson, however, sees no horror in the theme, but rather a gentle, shrewd and delightful humor.*

The Golem

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

THE GRAY-FACED PERSON CAME ALONG the street where old Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner lived. It was afternoon, it was autumn, the sun was warm and soothing to their ancient bones. Anyone who attended the movies in the twenties or the early thirties has seen that street a thousand times. Past these bungalows with their half-double roofs Edmund Lowe walked arm-in-arm with Leatrice Joy and Harold Lloyd was chased by Chinamen waving hatchets. Under these squamous palm trees Laurel kicked Hardy and Woolsey beat Wheeler upon the head with codfish. Across these pocket-handkerchief-sized lawns the juveniles of the Our Gang Comedies pursued one another and were pursued by angry fat men in golf knickers. On this same street — or perhaps on some other one of five hundred streets exactly like it.

Mrs. Gumbeiner indicated the gray-faced person to her husband.

"You think maybe he's got something the matter?" she asked. "He walks kind of funny, to me."

"Walks like a *golem*," Mr. Gumbeiner said indifferently.

The old woman was nettled.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "*I* think he walks like your cousin."

The old man pursed his mouth angrily and chewed on his pipestem. The gray-faced person turned up the concrete path, walked up the steps to the porch, sat down in a chair. Old Mr. Gumbeiner ignored him. His wife stared at the stranger.

"Man comes in without a hello,

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goodbye, or howareyou, sits himself down and right away he's at home. . . . The chair is comfortable?" she asked. "Would you like maybe a glass tea?"

She turned to her husband.

"Say something, Gumbeiner!" she demanded. "What are you, made of wood?"

The old man smiled a slow, wicked, triumphant smile.

"Why should *I* say anything?" he asked the air. "Who am I? Nothing, that's who."

The stranger spoke. His voice was harsh and monotonous.

"When you learn who — or, rather, what — I am, the flesh will melt from your bones in terror." He bared porcelain teeth.

"Never mind about my bones!" the old woman cried. "You've got a lot of nerve talking about my bones!"

"You will quake with fear," said the stranger. Old Mrs. Gumbeiner said that she hoped he would live so long. She turned to her husband once again.

"Gumbeiner, when are you going to mow the lawn?"

"All mankind —" the stranger began.

"*Shah!* I'm talking to my husband. . . . He talks *eppis* kind of funny, Gumbeiner, no?"

"Probably a foreigner," Mr. Gumbeiner said, complacently.

"You think so?" Mrs. Gumbeiner glanced fleetingly at the stranger. "He's got a very bad color in his face, *nebbich*. I suppose he came to California for his health."

"Disease, pain, sorrow, love, grief — all are nought to —"

Mr. Gumbeiner cut in on the stranger's statement.

"Gall bladder," the old man said. "Guinzburg down at the *shule* looked exactly the same before his operation. Two professors they had in for him, and a private nurse day and night."

"I am not a human being!" the stranger said loudly.

"Three thousand seven hundred fifty dollars it cost his son, Guinzburg told me. 'For you, Poppa, nothing is too expensive — only get well,' the son told him."

"*I am not a human being!*"

"Ai, is that a son for you!" the old woman said, rocking her head. "A heart of gold, pure gold." She looked at the stranger. "All right, all right, I heard you the first time. Gumbeiner! I asked you a question. When are you going to cut the lawn?"

"On Wednesday, *odder* maybe Thursday, comes the Japaneser to the neighborhood. To cut lawns is *his* profession. *My* profession is to be a glazier — retired."

"Between me and all mankind is an inevitable hatred," the stranger said. "When I tell you what I am, the flesh will melt —"

"You said, you said already," Mr. Gumbeiner interrupted.

"In Chicago where the winters were as cold and bitter as the Czar of Russia's heart," the old woman

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intoned, "you had strength to carry the frames with the glass together day in and day out. But in California with the golden sun to mow the lawn when your wife asks, for this you have no strength. Do I call in the Japaneser to cook for you supper?"

"Thirty years Professor Allardyce spent perfecting his theories. Electronics, neuronics —"

"Listen, how educated he talks," Mr. Gumbeiner said, admiringly. "Maybe he goes to the University here?"

"If he goes to the University, maybe he knows Bud?" his wife suggested.

"Probably they're in the same class and he came to see him about the homework, no?"

"Certainly he must be in the same class. How many classes are there? Five *in ganzen:* Bud showed me on his program card." She counted off on her fingers. "Television Appreciation and Criticism, Small Boat Building, Social Adjustment, The American Dance . . . The American Dance — nu, Gumbeiner —"

"Contemporary Ceramics," her husband said, relishing the syllables. "A fine boy, Bud. A pleasure to have him for a boardner."

"After thirty years spent in these studies," the stranger, who had continued to speak unnoticed, went on, "he turned from the theoretical to the pragmatic. In ten years' time he had made the most titanic discovery in history: he made mankind, *all* mankind, superfluous: he made *me.*"

"What did Tillie write in her last letter?" asked the old man.

The old woman shrugged.

"What should she write? The same thing. Sidney was home from the Army, Naomi has a new boy friend —"

"*He made* ME!"

"Listen, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," the old woman said; "maybe where you came from is different, but in *this* country you don't interupt people the while they're talking. . . . Hey. Listen — what do you mean, he *made* you? What kind of talk is that?"

The stranger bared all his teeth again, exposing the too-pink gums.

"In his library, to which I had a more complete access after his sudden and as yet undiscovered death from entirely natural causes, I found a complete collection of stories about androids, from Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Čapek's *R.U.R.* to Asimov's —"

"Frankenstein?" said the old man, with interest. "There used to be Frankenstein who had the soda-*wasser* place on Halstead Street: a Litvack, *nebbich.*"

"What are you talking?" Mrs. Gumbeiner demanded. "His name was Franken*thal*, and it wasn't on Halstead, it was on Roosevelt."

"— clearly shown that all mankind has an instinctive antipathy towards androids and there will be an inevitable struggle between them —"

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"Of course, of course!" Old Mr. Gumbeiner clicked his teeth against his pipe. "I am always wrong, you are always right. How could you stand to be married to such a stupid person all this time?"

"I don't know," the old woman said. "Sometimes I wonder, myself. I think it must be his good looks." She began to laugh. Old Mr. Gumbeiner blinked, then began to smile, then took his wife's hand.

"Foolish old woman," the stranger said; "why do you laugh? Do you not know I have come to destroy you?"

"What!" old Mr. Gumbeiner shouted. "Close your mouth, you!" He darted from his chair and struck the stranger with the flat of his hand. The stranger's head struck against the porch pillar and bounced back.

"When you talk to my wife, talk respectable, you hear?"

Old Mrs. Gumbeiner, cheeks very pink, pushed her husband back in his chair. Then she leaned forward and examined the stranger's head. She clicked her tongue as she pulled aside a flap of gray, skin-like material.

"Gumbeiner, look! He's all springs and wires inside!"

"I *told* you he was a *golem*, but no, you wouldn't listen," the old man said.

"You said he *walked* like a *golem*."

"How could he walk like a *golem* unless he *was* one?"

"All right, all right. . . . You broke him, so now fix him."

"My grandfather, his light shines from Paradise, told me that when MoHaRaL — Moreynu Ha-Rav Löw — his memory for a blessing, made the *golem* in Prague, three hundred? four hundred years ago? he wrote on his forehead the Holy Name."

Smiling reminiscently, the old woman continued, "And the *golem* cut the rabbi's wood and brought his water and guarded the ghetto."

"And one time only he disobeyed the Rabbi Löw, and Rabbi Löw erased the *Shem Ha-Mephorash* from the *golem's* forehead and the *golem* fell down like a dead one. And they put him up in the attic of the *shule* and he's still there today if the Communisten haven't sent him to Moscow. . . . This is not just a story," he said.

"*Avadda* not!" said the old woman.

"I myself have seen both the *shule and* the rabbi's grave," her husband said, conclusively.

"But I think this must be a different kind *golem*, Gumbeiner. See, on his forehead: nothing written."

"What's the matter, there's a law I can't write something there? Where is that lump clay Bud brought us from his class?"

The old man washed his hands, adjusted his little black skullcap, and slowly and carefully wrote four Hebrew letters on the gray forehead.

"Ezra the Scribe himself couldn't do better," the old woman said, admiringly. "Nothing happens," she observed, looking at the lifeless figure sprawled in the chair.

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"Well, after all, am I Rabbi Löw?" her husband asked, deprecatingly. "No," he answered. He leaned over and examined the exposed mechanism. "This spring goes here . . . this wire comes with this one . . ." The figure moved. "But this one goes where? And this one?"

"Let be," said his wife. The figure sat up slowly and rolled its eyes loosely.

"Listen, Reb *Golem*," the old man said, wagging his finger. "Pay attention to what I say — you understand?"

"Understand . . ."

"If you want to stay here, you got to do like Mr. Gumbeiner says."

"Do-like-Mr.-Gumbeiner-says . . ."

"*That's* the way I like to hear a *golem* talk. Malka, give here the mirror from the pocketbook. Look, you see your face? You see on the forehead, what's written? If you don't do like Mr. Gumbeiner says, he'll wipe out what's written and you'll be no more alive."

"No-more-alive . . ."

"*That's* right. Now, listen. Under the porch you'll find a lawnmower. Take it. And cut the lawn. Then come back. Go."

"Go . . ." The figure shambled down the stairs. Presently the sound of the lawnmower whirred through the quiet air in the street just like the street where Jackie Cooper shed huge tears on Wallace Beery's shirt and Chester Conklin rolled his eyes at Marie Dressler.

"So what will you write to Tillie?" old Mr. Gumbeiner asked.

"What should I write?" old Mrs. Gumbeiner shrugged. "I'll write that the weather is lovely out here and that we are both, Blessed be the Name, in good health."

The old man nodded his head slowly, and they sat together on the front porch in the warm afternoon sun.

Note:

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Here is something different in the way of blending science fiction and the murder story: a wry, screwball, harshly funny account of a murdered man who didn't die and the medical and legal shenanigans which accompanied his unorthodox survival — all of which could happen only in the Pueblo of Our Lady Queen of the Angels . . . and Angles.

He Had a Big Heart

by FRANK QUATTROCCHI

RICK JAMESON CHOSE LEAGUE NIGHT to put a .38 slug straight through my brother Dave's heart.

Peetie, the newsboy, ran into the bowling alley bar to tell us.

"I was cuttin' the string on the nine peeyem bundle when she . . ."

"Babe," somebody behind me supplied.

"Yeah, Babe. When Babe came runnin' down the street screamin' bloody murder. 'He's killed!' she was yellin'. She was cryin' and runnin' — she just had on a neg-lee-gee, you know . . ."

"Where and when was this?" I put in. But Peetie went on.

"Rick Jameson — he done it. Cops found him out in the alley afterwards. He was full o' wine. He done it just after Dave and Babe got in Babe's room and . . ." Peetie looked over toward me to see if it was all right to go on. ". . . and he got Dave right through the heart."

"Imagine it being Rick Jameson," somebody, probably the bartender, commented. He summed up our reactions pretty well, I thought.

Paul Wilson, our bowling team captain, put a hand on my shoulder. "I guess you got to go, Henry," he said. "They're going to want you at the morgue."

"He ain't at the morgue," Peetie put in.

"He's got to be at the morgue," Wilson said. "That's where they put the DOAs that have been murdered."

"But he ain't," said Peetie. "He's at Georgia Street right now."

The big guy in the white jacket at the desk looked up and asked me who. I gave him Dave's full name, David Francis Bailey, and he ran a finger down a long list.

"DOA," he said without looking up. "Gunshot wound in the . . . Wait a minute, they got a note attached on here." He squinted at the list. "Who're you?" he asked.

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"I'm his brother, Henry."

"Brother, huh? Well, the note says to send his wife or whoever in to see the doc." He pressed a button and gave me a peculiar look.

He talked to somebody on the other end of the line and led me into a white room with a row of benches around it. I waited there long enough for the smell to begin working on me, when the door opened and a middle-aged guy in a white jacket came in.

"Mr. Bailey? I'm Dr. Hendler."

"What do I have to do?" I asked after we shook hands.

"Do?"

"I know already," I said. "Dave got it in the heart. I just came to do whatever . . . you do."

"You were close to your brother?"

I knew what he meant, but I just told him we'd once occupied the same room. I didn't tell him Dave had skipped letting me pay the whole rent.

"Well, Mr. Bailey," he said. "Your brother isn't quite dead."

"He isn't what?"

"David Bailey was shot through the heart, the bullet penetrating and shattering the . . ."

"And he ain't dead?" I said.

"Let me explain," said the doc. "For several years now my colleagues and I have been working on a very very complex machine . . ."

"Machine? What's that got to do with Dave?" I put in.

"Please. The function of this machine is to circulate the blood in much the same way as the human heart. When perfected, the machine will help surgeons operate upon a patient's own heart, which will have been put at rest for the duration of the operation.

"Now, Mr. Bailey, we had experimented with our machine until we believed it nearing perfection. But it was necessary that one final experiment be performed."

"On Dave?" I asked.

"Yes. We had been waiting for just such a case as your brother's. David Bailey was pronounced dead by the police doctor. His heart had stopped beating. But other than his heart your brother was unharmed. We therefore felt justified in using him in our experiment. It could do him no further harm."

"You got Dave hooked up to this machine?" I asked.

"He is in a deep coma at present. He has remained alive — that is, breathing — for slightly more than two hours."

"Now what?"

"Well," said Dr. Hendler, "he cannot possibly survive. His own heart was damaged beyond repair. . . ."

He looked almost apologetic.

Count on good old Dave! I thought. "Well," I said, "you people call on me when you want me to do something."

After all, maybe there was a chance to make the bowling League's third game. It would be a whole lot better than them taking two-thirds of my average.

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But the leagues had finished early. I went back to my room and found Pat O'Neal, the reporter for the *Daily News*, pocketing a picture of Dave that had been sitting on my bureau. He had let himself in.

"What's this about your brother getting killed?" he asked. "Hear he didn't have his pants on."

"Yeah," I said. "Rick Jameson did it with a .38. Only he ain't dead."

O'Neal's pink face lit up like a light globe and I spent the next six months wondering why I had said that.

I told him what the doc had told me. "But don't waste your time on it, Pat," I said. "Soon as they disconnect that machine it'll be just like any other such thing."

That's how all the rest of it happened.

The next morning my brother Dave got more space in the Los Angeles papers than the school board, a shmoo-shaped flying saucer, and the story of Marilyn Monroe's calendar.

Mechanical heart brings man back to life.

That's what they ran over O'Neal's byline. The other sheets had pretty much the same kind of thing. They all laid it on thick. Babe, Dave's sweetie, became a "mystery woman" and a "dark beauty," and she had gone "screaming through the city streets, scantily clad . . ."

But the big pitch was that "destiny chose a cheap Vermont Avenue crook to save from the clutches of death by science's newest tool, the mechanical heart," as the *Mirror* had summed it up.

Maybe that is why I decided to go see Dave that morning. After all, this was becoming quite a story and such things usually don't happen to people like me — or Dave either.

There were five or six white jackets bending over the cot when I finally got them to usher me through the reporters and curiosity seekers. Dave was there all right. He was white as the sheets on his cot but he was conscious and raising cain.

"That dirty son-of-a-bitch!" he was saying to nobody in particular.

"Dave," I said finally, "it's me, your brother Henry."

He turned his head, causing one of the white jackets to jump. "Henry, that you there?" he asked. His voice had gone down three or four degrees.

"Yeah, Dave. How you feel?"

"Henry, he got me — *bad*. That dirty . . ."

"Yeah, I know," I said.

"And . . . Henry, you know what?"

"What, Dave?"

"They . . . they won't even be able to gas that son-of-a-bitch . . . !"

"Huh?"

"Jameson. They can't get him for . . . *for killing me!*"

I hadn't thought of that. I guess

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it didn't make as much difference to me as it did right then to Dave.

"At least not . . . yet," Dave muttered, lowering his voice quite a lot.

I made a point of wondering about it later. Dave lapsed back into his pillow and moaned a little.

"I'm . . . going, Henry."

"You don't look so bad," I said.

"Thanks, kid, but I am. I ain't got no . . . heart." His voice almost went away. "The doc says I ain't got no heart left at all."

"Maybe you'll pull out of it OK, Dave," I said to be saying something. "After all, other people get along without things."

Dave seemed to consider it, but finally he shook his head. "Henry, you know that suede jacket you always said I bought with your unemployment check?"

"Yeah, Dave."

"Well, Henry, it's yours. You take it."

I guess it was as much as he could do.

About 50 of the regulars met me at the door of the bowling alley. I never before realized how many of them practically lived there. They were eating it up. It was the greatest thing that ever happened to the bowling alley — and me too, I guess.

Peetie was doing a land office business in newspapers. He told his story with each copy he sold. The story was improving with the telling.

The rest were giving their versions. Each one of them found some way he fitted into the thing, even if he was only sitting in the bar when Peetie came in to tell about it. One of them even had what he was sure was a drawing of how Dave's heart worked.

But it was a stranger who nudged me over against the cigarette machine in the bar. He put himself up close and managed to get a lot of privacy. He was a big guy who wore a blue serge suit and a cigar.

"Friend," he said, "next time you see Dave you tell him I'm prepared to sit tight on a certain little matter he will know about."

"That's nice," I said.

"Yeah, until we can work out a little deal." I didn't like that word, *deal*. "You tell him I got a little deal working which I will contact him about. Tell him to hold everything till he hears from John Ritt."

I couldn't think of any kind of deal Dave could be contacted about. It was a miracle they had managed to keep him alive through the night. But I didn't pass along my doubts to the guy in the blue serge suit. He might not have understood.

Dave made it through to the following Monday. The papers let nobody in Los Angeles forget it. The A.M.'s carried box scores on the amount of time Dave had remained alive without a heart.

That afternoon after work there was a wire waiting for me. It had been pawed over by everybody in

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the rooming house, but I could still read it.

The hospital, particularly Dr. Hendler, wanted me to come over right away. They wanted me to come through the ambulance entrance.

I found out why when I got about eight blocks away. Cars were jammed into every parking space and people were streaming toward the hospital lawns.

When I got close enough I saw the picket line and the signs:

DON'T KILL DAVE BAILEY!

DAVE DIED ONCE. DON'T KILL HIM AGAIN!

THE LORD SPARED HIM. NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

Just as I was about to ask somebody what it was all about I caught sight of Pat O'Neal.

"What's going on, Pat?"

He grinned at me under his moustache and handed me a copy of the *Daily News*' late morning edition.

"*Dave faces death for second time.*"

"The doc wants his heart back," explained O'Neal.

"He *what?*"

"The doc — the one that made the machine — he wants Dave's mechanical heart back."

"Oh," I said.

"By the way," O'Neal said. "I want to see you later about Dave's childhood."

"Huh?"

"I'm handling his publicity."

The hospital people shuffled me right to Dr. Hendler's office. The doc was pretty upset. He said he wanted me to help him and when I asked him with what he went into quite a long story.

"Have you ever heard of a man named Donald Pickett?"

"Nope, can't place him."

"Well, Pickett is an elderly gentleman who lives in Pasadena. He is well known among the medical profession for his grants and gifts. It was his donation of money that enabled us to make the mechanical heart."

"Gosh," I said. "I'd like to meet him. So would Dave."

"Yes," said the doc, "Pickett is a very great little man. For his size . . ." he stopped himself and then restarted. "However, he is also a gravely ill man. Heart trouble."

"That's too bad," I said.

"*Heart* trouble, Mr. Bailey," he repeated.

"Pretty bad stuff," I said.

"Yes." The doc wanted me to say something else. "Mr. Pickett, the sponsor of the *mechanical heart* has *heart* trouble."

I got it then. "And that means . . ." I said.

"Yes, Mr. Bailey. But that is only part of the story. I can't say more at this point, because . . . well, there are reasons. But you now know some of the facts, and you've known all along that your brother couldn't last very long."

He didn't have to tell me what he wanted me to do and I suppose he couldn't tell me how to do it. I tried

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to think of something on the way to Dave's room. But I failed and, anyway, it wouldn't have worked.

Dave was sitting up on the cot reading the papers. He greeted me cheerfully enough and waved toward the papers strewn all over his cot.

"They gave it quite a play, huh?"

"Yeah," I said. "Gee, you're looking good, Dave."

"Christ, that's a lousy picture of me in the *News*, though. Got to get O'Neal to shoot some more."

"Gee, Dave," I started out, "it's too bad what they're saying . . ."

"Crazy, huh?" He looked up at me and started to laugh. He laughed until the docs in the room got nervous and started to walk over.

"You don't think they'd go through with it, Henry?"

"Gee, Dave . . ."

"Why, Henry, we practically planted that story ourselves. By tomorrow I'll have them so damned scared of me they'll take out insurance. With this much publicity and what we got cooked up I could get elected president."

"Dave," I said. "The doc . . ."

But Dave wasn't listening. "Come to think of it, how would it be to be president, Henry?" He was laughing so hard after this that the docs got nervous and showed me out.

Next morning riding in Murphy's car I found out what Dave meant. It hit all the papers at about the same time, O'Neal's work, I suppose.

In the *Daily News* it was the "Save Dave Bailey Campaign." In the *Mirror* it was the "Have a Heart Fund." The *Herald-Express* called it a "Buy a Heart for Dave Bailey, Inc."

The *Examiner* tied it in with its anti-vivisection pitch and called it "Stop Needless Slaughter of Life Fund." Even the Los Angeles *Times* had a news story about a group of "prominent Southland citizens giving their time and effort" to a "David Bailey Fund." And it was in the *Times* that I got the first inkling of what was coming, more or less.

"Hey, get this," said one of the guys in Murph's car. He had the insides of one of the papers. "They arraigned that guy, Rick Jameson. The guy that shot your brother. *Murder*, by God!"

"Murder?" said Murphy, taking his eyes off the road too long for me to like. "How they going to do that, Henry?"

"Hell," said the guy with the paper. "It'll be murder before his trial comes up, won't it?"

They didn't ask me and I was glad not to have to answer that.

But it was the Campaign that did the business. I didn't know anything about it until one evening during the week I noticed a sign over the bowling alley: "Dave Bailey Open Singles Tonight."

I went in out of curiosity and was immediately greeted by Peetie and Frank Stolle, one of the pin boys. It took me a while to recognize them.

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Peetie was all dressed up in a light check sports jacket and a bright yellow shirt buttoned at the neck. Stolle, who wore a hat even when setting pins, had a new one about the shade of cigar smoke. Below the hat he wore a blue serge suit.

"I don't know a damn thing," I said, heading them off, I supposed. "I ain't seen Dave for a week."

"That's OK, Henry," said Peetie, producing a cigar. "*We* saw him."

"You did?"

"Yeah," put in Stolle, watching Peetie's cigar very closely. "He called us in, didn't he, Peetie?"

"He and John Ritt, o' course," confirmed Peetie.

"He and who?" I asked.

"John Ritt," said Peetie. "He's a real great guy when you get to know him. Huh, Stolle?"

"Yeah, he sure is. You remember him, don't you, Henry? Comes around here sometimes. Used to be with a circus."

"Used to *own* a circus," put in Peetie.

Then I made John Ritt. He was the big guy in the blue serge suit the first night Dave got shot.

I also remembered the "deal." That is I now remembered; I didn't remember at the time to tell Dave that Ritt had a deal for him. Of course, there were a lot of things happening about that time.

I was pretty sure Ritt wouldn't think to ask me if I ever told Dave about him having a deal with him. I was hoping he wouldn't.

"He says he wants to get in touch with you sometime, Henry," said Peetie.

"Maybe he wants to fit you into the Campaign, Henry," said Stolle. Stolle was always very friendly toward me and Dave. But he was not very smart and I was not too sure of why Ritt wanted to see me. If he did.

"You wanna see the Campaign stuff?" asked Stolle eagerly. Peetie gave him a dirty look, but the two of them led me to the bowling alley storage room anyway.

There were big Dave Bailey sandwich cards for all the kids to wear. There were bundles and bundles of handbills. There were packages of posters for fences and vacant store fronts. There were things to paste on your windshield.

"Dave and John put me in charge of that," said Stolle.

There were streamers to go above the streets and cans of paint for sidewalks. There were hats and horns for dance parties. There were millions of buttons, each with Dave's picture and the words: "I Had a Heart."

There were baseball caps and heart-shaped pendants and even ballpoint pens with hearts printed on them.

"This stuff is for me," said Peetie.

"Quite a layout," I said. Frank Stolle lit up a cigar.

"That brother of yours," said Peetie finally and happily, "has sure got a big heart."

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But old Dave had one more little surprise for us. It started for me, at least, with a loud knocking on my door just as it was beginning to get light. I fumbled my way across the room and let in two big L. A. cops.

"Get your clothes on quick," one of them said.

"What'd I do?"

"It's your brother. Get going."

"What did Dave do?" I asked.

"He stole a heart that didn't belong to him," said the cop.

The hospital grounds were jammed with people even at 7 in the morning. About a dozen cops were trying to herd people back from the hospital and on down the street. But more people were coming in from all directions. I caught a glimpse of a couple of familiar faces and the thing began to take on a kind of meaning to me. Frank Stolle and Peetie and practically the entire bowling alley gang were circulating through the crowds handing out the stuff I had seen in the storage room.

"Don't worry about a thing," Peetie called to me as the cops pushed and shoved me through the crowds. "Dave'll have you out in no time."

All hell broke loose about this time. The two cops dropped me at the front entrance of the hospital and took off.

A brass band was marching down Georgia street.

It was part of a full-fledged parade that now was coming into sight. There were about a hundred marchers, each of them with a Dave Bailey poster. Then came rows of big red circus wagons pulled by cars.

There were even clowns, following along beside the wagons and cutting up.

Then a great cheer went up.

It was Dave. Dave was sitting in the back seat of the biggest, brightest, reddest Cadillac I had ever seen before.

And riding along on a little two-wheeled trailer all draped in red, white, and blue crepe paper, was the mechanical heart! I knew it was the mechanical heart because a big, bright sign said so. You could hear a generator running somewhere inside the trailer with it.

If you looked very very closely you could see the black hoses that led out over the back of the trailer, down by the trailer hitch, and up over the trunk of the Cadillac. I remember thinking it was certainly good that the doctors had given Dave enough slack to begin with. Although, I suppose, they could have put the mechanical heart in the trunk with the spare tire. But then they would have had to cut holes through the trunk or maybe leave the trunk up and open. It wouldn't have been as good.

Finally, just behind the Cadillac and its trailer was a big, red-painted armored truck with a sign:

HERE'S YOUR MONEY, SHYLOCK!

And damned if there wasn't about a dozen guys trailing the trailer,

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looking like they come straight from a Pershing Square park bench debate, with signs saying FREE RICK JAMESON!

"Mr. Bailey," said a voice in the crowd near me. It was Dr. Hendler. He plowed his way through to me with a lot of hard work. "My God, I'm glad I found you! Follow me."

"What's up?" I asked. "What you want me for?"

It was hard for him to answer in those crowds. "You'll see. . . . We may need you . . . later when Mr. Pickett . . ."

That is about all I heard. A loudspeaker on Dave's car started up.

"THIS IS DAVE BAILEY TALKING."

The crowd roared.

"THE DOCS ARE GONNA GET THEIR MONEY ALL RIGHT," boomed my brother's voice. "BUT THAT AIN'T ALL. THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. WHEN WE GET THROUGH HERE WE'RE GONNA PUT ON A LITTLE SHOW!"

I caught sight of Dave for the first time. He was sitting on cushions holding onto the microphone. He was covered with bright red blankets, the kind you see at the track.

"YOU'RE ALL INVITED. BRING THE KIDDIES . . ."

The doc, who was just ahead of me and about 30 feet from Dave's Cadillac, turned my way. "Watch. We may need you any time now."

There was a commotion ahead, just out of my sight. I stood on tiptoes and got a glimpse of something. Then, as somebody moved to one side, I caught sight of what it was:

A little bitty guy in a black derby had separated himself from the crowd and was shaking a black umbrella at Dave!

"Donald Pickett," said the doc over his shoulder at me.

The crowd quieted down all at once and I began to catch a tiny little voice.

"Young man," it said. "You must not take that artificial heart."

"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU, SHORTIE?"

"I am Pickett. The artificial heart is rightfully mine."

The owner of the voice must have been all of a yard tall. People were doing everything to try to catch sight of him.

Then Dave stood up in the back seat of the Cad. People gasped at this and several guys stood up to hold him and adjust the red blankets.

"Look, Mr. What's-Your-Name," said Dave. He had left the microphone behind. "I got the heart and I got the money to pay for it."

"My artificial heart is not for sale," snapped the midget. "It will never be sold and it must never be taken from the hospital. It is for the use of those who need it."

"Well I sure as hell need it," said Dave.

"And you shall have it," said Pickett. "But not to go galavanting around the country as a *sideshow freak!*"

"Huh?" said Dave.

"Nor *can* you do so, Mr. Bailey," continued Pickett.

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"What you mean, shortie? Who's gonna stop me? I got the heart and I even got the money to pay for it. We're gonna have a show and I'm gonna be the big attraction."

"Quite impossible, Mr. Bailey, as you could ascertain if you had asked the doctor who built the machine."

"What . . . what you mean?"

"Look at me!"

Dave tried to laugh. It didn't come off.

"The mechanical heart was designed for *me*, Bailey."

There was a gasp from those who heard the little guy.

"This is what I didn't tell you," said Dr. Hendler to me. "Get ready to try to appeal to your brother if this doesn't work."

"So what?" shouted Dave.

"So how much do you weigh, Mr. Bailey?" asked the midget.

"Why . . ." started Dave. Then he caught on, just about the same time I did.

"Doc," I said, trying to make sure.

"Yes. We didn't let this out before because we weren't sure of whether your brother would live long enough for it to make a difference. Telling him might have hampered his slender chance."

The little man continued: "You can have the use of the heart as long as you live and until we build a new one, Mr. Bailey. But I'm afraid your plans to go on the road must be ended."

"Look, Pickett . . ." sputtered Dave. "You mean I gotta . . . stay in the hospital . . . in *bed?*"

"I'm afraid so."

There was a long pause. Nobody anywhere said a word.

"NO!" shouted Dave suddenly. "Ritt! Get goin'! Get us out of here quick!"

Dr. Hendler and I started moving just as Dave began shouting orders to his driver.

Somebody in the crowd screamed and people began to shout. Some of them thought it was a trick. Some shouted for Dave to be careful. . . .

I heard a Cadillac motor start and saw Dave, still on his feet and gesturing to the people in the parade.

Then I saw him topple.

I believe my brother Dave got the biggest funeral anybody on the avenue ever saw before. Donald H. Pickett made the arrangements and picked up the bill. Somehow or other he got the names of just about everybody who ever came in to the bowling alley.

Everybody rode in black Cadillacs. There were really truck loads of flowers. I just wish my brother Dave could have seen it.

There is just one more thing. Rick Jameson. You remember he was the one that started the whole thing by shooting Dave.

Well, it's sort of complicated. The D.A. tried to get Rick on a Murder One, saying, and I quote, he had him cold on the ancient doctrine of

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Rex v. Reading as affirmed in Commonwealth v. Hackett. The first judge said a California case called People v. Lewis made it manslaughter, but Rick's lawyer had an ace in the hole, by name State v. Scates. It went on the road through the courts and wound up getting kicked out of the State Supreme Court, Carter dissenting. Then the *Mirror* started a series of stories:

Crime Without Punishment!

What About the Man Who Shot Dave Bailey?

People just wouldn't stand for another one. So eventually Rick got six months — for breaking and entering.

It worked out all right, at that. Rick and Babe even got married. Matter of fact I bowl with them sometimes on Sundays.

Some Questions and Answers

Not too long ago we conducted a little survey among some of our subscribers. We have received over 400 replies to our questionnaire and thought you would like to know how our survey turned out. So here are the results:

Serial stories spread over two or more issues were vetoed by 60.1% of the people polled; the remaining 39.9% indicated approval.

Fewer science fiction novelets were preferred by only 14.4%; 53.6% liked our present distribution of one or two per issue; and 32% would like to see more.

Only 21.9% wanted fewer fantasy stories; 42.9% indicated a desire to see more; and 35.2% were content with our present policy.

58.7% turned down the idea of interior illustrations, while 41.3% liked the idea.

The overwhelming majority of 74.2% did not wish to see a letters column in F&SF; 25.8% said they would like to have one.

As we're not sure that these 400-odd responses represent either an adequate sampling or a representative cross-section of our readership, we'd like very much to see several hundred more. Won't you take a minute to jot down some of your feelings about the five points discussed above and send them to us at 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York?

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As welcome a bit of news as has turned up in some time for readers of mysteries and westerns is that Frank Gruber, after many years in Hollywood, is back in production, turning out books more rapidly than anyone save Simenon and brightening the lives of readers and reviewers with his own unique vein of zany humor. I've always regretted that Mr. Gruber, so prolific in other fields, has been so grudging in his production of fantasy; to the best of my knowledge, he's written only three short stories — and it's my pleasure to revive one of these for you now, in which Gruber's easy naturalism lends unusual conviction to a classic supernatural theme.

The Thirteenth Floor

by FRANK GRUBER

THE MOTTO OF THE BONANZA STORE was: "If The Bonanza Hasn't Got It, It Isn't." Now and then, friends and an occasional rash employee suggested to Alf Orpington that the wording of the motto was a trifle ambiguous, but the owner of The Bonanza did not take kindly to criticism. "We sell everything," he would snort, "and if we haven't got it, there just isn't such a thing. That's what the motto says."

It was a big store. It covered an entire block on State Street and towered eighteen stories into the sky. You could buy a spool of thread in The Bonanza and you could get complete equipment for an eight months' safari into the Belgian Congo.

The Bonanza was Javelin's last hope; if he couldn't get what he wanted here, he would have to have it made, which meant putting off the trip at least another week. He didn't really expect to find it in a department store, but he had seen the motto in the store's newspaper advertisements that morning and it was worth a trial.

So he let the women buffet him along toward the elevators. There was a sale of print dresses on the third floor and you know what print dresses do to women.

There was an octagonal information booth in the center of the store and Javelin tried to get to it, but the sea of prospective print dress buyers was too strong and he was swept helplessly to the elevators. There were two banks of six eleva-

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tors each and the women poured into the cages and filled them to capacity. When the door of one closed, they attacked another. Javelin moved with the ladies, but he never quite got his foot into one of the elevators. The women somehow always managed to elbow him aside. He was left standing outside of Elevator #8, then #7 and finally #6 and #5.

"Strategy," he thought grimly. "I'll beat them by strategy."

And so he moved from Elevator #5 all the way back to #12. He planted himself squarely in front of the door. It would take a few minutes, but he'd be damned if they'd budge him from this door. When it opened he would step inside. And no wave of women would wash him aside.

The door of Elevator #12 opened and a freckle-faced youth of nineteen or twenty grinned at him. "Going up?"

Javelin shot a quick look off to the right. Women were storming into Elevator #4.

"Up," he said and stepped nimbly into Elevator #12.

The operator let the door swing shut and looked at Javelin, an inquiry in his eyes.

Surprised, Javelin asked: "Nobody else?"

"Not this trip . . . Floor?"

"I don't know," Javelin said. "As a matter of fact, I don't even know if the store carries what I'm looking for."

The freckle-faced youth chuckled. "The motto of The Bonanza Store is . . ."

". . . 'If The Bonanza Hasn't Got It, It Isn't.' "

"Right, sir."

"I'm looking for a distilling outfit. It's a copper tank, with coils of copper tubing. It's used for distilling water. . . ."

"Are you kidding?"

Javelin looked sharply at the elevator operator. "Not at all. Where I'm going you can't drink the water because it's always contaminated by . . ."

"Oh, sure. We have that trouble right here in Chicago. Lots of people can't drink Lake Michigan water. That's why they buys these, uh, distilling outfits. . . . Thirteenth floor."

The elevator operator pushed down his lever and the cage shot skywards. Javelin frowned at the black floor numbers as they shot past him. 5, 6, 7, 8 . . .

The speed of the elevator began to decrease. Number 13 appeared and the car came to a halt. The elevator operator reached for the door, but did not open it at once.

"You know what I been thinking — all these people buying these, ah, distilling outfits. . . ." He leaned toward Javelin and closed one eye. "Could it be that *some* of them use them to make a little hooch?"

Javelin shrugged. "They were used for that in the old Prohibition days, yes."

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The boy swung open the door of the thirteenth floor. "Yeah, in the old prohibition days." He grunted. "Wise guy!"

Javelin stepped out of the elevator, turned to look back at the freckle-faced youth. But the door was already swinging shut. He shook his head and walked forward, through an aisle oddly deserted, and another, in which there wasn't even a salesgirl. It was then that Javelin stopped. The main floor of the store had been jammed with shoppers. Many of them had gone only to the third floor print dress sale, but this was the middle of the afternoon and it was only logical that shoppers should have penetrated to the upper floors.

But this floor was completely deserted. Merchandise there was, on the counters and on the shelves. But where were the buyers? And the salespeople!

Javelin reached a center aisle, turned right and passed into another department. And still his own footsteps were the only sounds he heard.

He cleared his throat. "Hello," he called suddenly. "Is anybody here?"

There was no response. Not even an echo. Javelin stopped again. He looked up an aisle to the right, down one to the left and then turned clear around and looked back in the direction he had come. Not a living soul was in sight.

Javelin became aware suddenly of the chilliness of the air in the store. "That's the trouble with this air conditioning," he thought. "Either it doesn't work at all, or it works too well and you have to wear an overcoat indoors."

He drew a deep breath and essayed another aisle. It was as deserted as the previous ones. Suddenly irked, Javelin wheeled and headed in the general direction of the elevators.

"Yes?" said a voice. "What can I do for you?"

Startled, Javelin whirled. A tall young man in a blue suit and wearing a white carnation smiled at him.

"What kind of a store do you call this?" Javelin exclaimed. "The place is like a morgue. No salespeople, no customers."

The man smiled pleasantly. "Is there anything special you wanted?"

"Yes," Javelin snapped. "A water distilling outfit."

"Of course, sir."

Javelin was surprised. "You have them?"

"The Bonanza carries everything. If you'll step this way . . ."

The floorwalker turned, walked a few yards, then made a sharp right turn and led the way to another aisle, a department displaying kettles of all shapes and sizes and a vast amount of copper tubing, as well as all the paraphernalia that went with a distilling outfit: malt, hops, filters, bottles, caps and bottling machines.

A girl stood behind one of the counters writing in an order book.

"Miss Carmichael," the floor-

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walker said, smoothly. "Will you show this gentleman a distilling outfit?"

The girl looked up and Javelin had to resist an involuntary desire to whistle long and low. The girl was young, not more than twenty or twenty-one. She was tall and slender, with finely chiseled features, hair like spun gold and the smoothest skin in all Chicago.

She smiled at Javelin, exposing teeth so white and even that they seemed to have been capped by a Hollywood dentist, yet could not have been.

"How large an outfit were you thinking of?" she asked. She came out from behind the counter and crossed to a display of copperware.

Javelin stared at her as open-mouthed as a Bremer County, Iowa youth seeing Hedy Lamarr for the first time. She reached the distillers, turned and looked at Javelin, still standing on the spot from where he had first spied her.

"If you'll step over here, please . . ."

Javelin came alive. He moved toward the girl. "I'll take it," he said.

"Which one?"

"Any one of them; it doesn't matter."

"But you must have had a certain size in mind."

"Yes, of course."

"Well . . . ?" Her lips parted in an amused smile.

Javelin blinked and shook his head to change the burning focus of his eyes. They lit upon a gleaming copper kettle. "This one's too small."

"It's five gallons."

"I'll need at least a ten-gallon size. You see, I'm going on a trip up the Amazon and there'll be eight or ten men in the party. We'll need a lot of water. . . ." He stopped, for Miss Carmichael's smile had reached great proportions. He looked at her in surprise. "I beg your pardon?"

The smile disappeared. "I'm sorry."

"Why should you be sorry?"

"Because of what I was — well, thinking. . . ."

"*What* were you thinking?"

She looked past him and a tiny frown creased her smooth forehead. Javelin glanced over his shoulder and met the look of the immaculate floorwalker, who was standing some twenty feet away, a disapproving expression on his face.

He turned back to the salesgirl.

She said: "There's no law against a man buying a distilling outfit; if he wants to say that it's for the purpose of distilling water, why . . ."

"But it is!"

"Of course it is."

Javelin frowned. It seemed suddenly very important to him that the salesgirl should believe him. "Look," he said, "I know what these outfits were used for in the old days. I suppose there are some thrifty souls who still use them for that.

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But I assure you, I never acquired a taste for home-made hooch. I much prefer to buy my Lord Calvert in the nearest liquor store."

"Oh, yes, the nearest liquor store." The salesgirl's eyes crinkled. "Now, here's a lovely ten-gallon sti — distilling outfit."

"How much is it?"

"Just the tank, or the complete outfit?"

"Complete."

"With condensing coils, $49.75."

Javelin took out his wallet and extracted a fifty dollar bill. "Could you have it sent to the Alonzo Apartments?"

"Just a moment." The girl went back to the counter and picked up her salesbook and pencil. "The Alonzo Apartments, Mr. . . . ?"

"Dick, I mean Richard Javelin. Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio Street."

The girl wrote rapidly in her salesbook. Looking down at the top of her head, Javelin asked: "What time does the store close?"

"Six o'clock," she replied, without looking up.

Javelin cleared his throat, swallowed hard. "I, uh, was thinking, I mean, I wonder, would you go somewhere and have a drink with me, or perhaps dinner?"

She finished writing, took the fifty dollars from him and stepping to a cash register, rang up the sale. She returned with a quarter change.

"The employees' entrance," she said, "about five minutes after six."

She handed him the duplicate sales slip.

"Great," he exulted. "I'll be waiting for you."

She smiled faintly, said, "Thank you, Mr. Javelin," in a clear tone and stooped to make a further notation in her salesbook.

Javelin turned away. At the end of the aisle, the floorwalker stood where he had been during Javelin's entire time in the department.

"Did you get what you wanted?" he asked.

"Everything," replied Javelin.

He passed the floorwalker, made a right turn and discovered that the elevators were right ahead. He pushed the pearl button for "Down" and the door of Elevator #12 opened instantly, smoothly.

The freckle-faced young operator smiled at Javelin. "Service, sir, that's my motto."

"I thought it was: 'If The Bonanza Hasn't Got It, It Isn't'?"

"That's the store's motto; my personal one is, 'Service, sir.' "

The elevator door slipped shut and the cage began descending swiftly. "Get what you wanted?" the operator asked, looking at Javelin over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Sorry? Why should you be sorry?"

The boy shook his head, smiled wanly and brought the elevator to a stop. "Main floor," he announced.

The door opened and Javelin

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stepped out into a yawning maw of women, still seeking print dresses. He struggled through the waves of femininity and at last reached the street.

At five minutes to 6 Javelin entered the alley between State and Wabash. He found a set of metal-sheathed doors on which was painted: THE BONANZA STORE, EMPLOYEES' ENTRANCE and lighting a cigarette, leaned against the wall.

A smile of anticipation played over his lips.

He threw away the cigarette when the doors opened and women and girls began to pour into the alley. They came in a steady, hurrying stream, glad to leave the store, anxious to get to their homes, their trysts. Inside the doors the time clocks beat a steady ping, ping as the employees' cards were stamped.

Men came out, too: stock-clerks, floorwalkers, elevator operators, managers and assistant managers. But mostly there were girls and women, hundreds and hundreds of them.

Five minutes after 6, ten minutes after. The stream became a trickle, diminished to a drip. Twenty minutes after 6 and only a man or two came out.

Javelin stepped into the doorway, peered inside. A uniformed watchman looked inquiringly at him.

"I'm waiting for a young lady."

The watchman shrugged. "About all out, I guess." He looked at the batteries of time cards, stuck in their metal slots on the wall. "Yep," he said.

"But I've been waiting here since before 6." Javelin frowned. "She couldn't have left early?"

"Not that I know of. What's her name?"

"Carmichael."

The watchman stepped up to the racks of timecards, ran a stubby finger down them. "A, B, C . . . Carmen, Carpenter, Carter . . . no Carmichael."

Impulsively, Javelin exclaimed. "Carmichael. C-a-r-m-i-c-h-a-e-l."

"I can spell. Don't no Carmichael work here."

"But I met her upstairs. The floorwalker called her by name."

"Sorry; if her name was Carmichael there'd be a card here." The watchman put his tongue into his cheek. "Maybe he was her boyfriend and gave you a bum steer on purpose. Could be."

Chagrined, Javelin turned away. He left the alley and walked slowly to State Street. He passed every one of the customers' doors, then retraced his steps. But it was no use. The store was tightly closed for the night. Only charwomen and watchmen were inside.

Javelin spent a miserable evening. He had several drinks in a bar, went to a movie and was so restless that he left within fifteen minutes. He returned to his apartment and went to bed. And then remained awake until long past 2 A.M.

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At 9:30 in the morning, Javelin entered The Bonanza Store. The print dress sale was apparently over, at least the crush of women on the main floor was not so great as the day before. Javelin got to the elevator banks with only minor jostling. He entered a car. There were already several passengers inside and a half dozen more got in after Javelin. Then a signal from the starter caused the operator, a chunky, uniformed girl, to close the doors.

"Second floor," she droned. "Ladies' millinery, gloves, handbags, accessories . . ."

The elevator stopped at the second floor, let out a few women and took on some. It worked its way gradually upwards, stopping at every floor. When it reached the tenth floor, there were only two passengers left besides Javelin. One got off on the eleventh floor and the other on the twelfth.

"Thirteen, please," Javelin said.

"Ain't no thirteenth floor," the operator said. "You want fourteen . . . ?"

"No," Javelin said, promptly. "I want the thirteenth."

The girl looked around. "This building doesn't have a thirteenth floor. It jumps from twelve to fourteen. Some people are superstitious. . . ." She brought the car to a halt at the fourteenth floor. "This is really the thirteenth floor, only we call it the fourteenth."

Javelin looked out upon departments he had never seen before: a floor with salespeople and a sprinkling of customers, a floor that seemed to carry only furniture.

He shook his head. "I was in the store, yesterday," he said, patiently. "On the *thirteenth* floor. I purchased something here."

The girl shrugged. "Ain't this the floor?"

"It wasn't furniture I bought."

"All right, Mister, I'll take you back to the twelfth floor." The girl let the door swing shut and dropped the elevator one floor. She opened the door. "Is this it?"

Javelin looked out upon a sea of curtains, drapes, window shades. "No, this isn't the floor. And it *was* the thirteenth!"

"It wasn't the twelfth floor and it wasn't the fourteenth," the operator said, patiently. "It was the thirteenth . . . only we ain't got no thirteenth floor in the store. I oughtta know, mister. I work here. Believe it or not, I jockey this cage up and down all day long from 9:30 to 6. I been doing it for more'n a year. I've never seen no thirteenth floor. . . . Now, you wanna go down to the main floor and ask Information?"

"Yes."

The operator closed the door and descended to the main floor, taking on a few passengers as she went along. The car disgorged a full load on the first floor.

Still angry, Javelin made his way to the octagonal information booth in the center of the store. It was

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presided over by two middle-aged women.

"Can you tell me on what floor the distilling outfits are?" he asked one of the women.

"Dis — distilling, did you say?"

"Distilling. They're copper kettles, or tanks, with a coil of tubing. . . ."

"Mmm," said the woman. "That ought to be kitchenware, or hardware, maybe. Yes, try hardware, seventh floor."

"It's on the thirteenth floor," Javelin said, firmly.

"We have no thirteenth floor."

Smiling thinly, Javelin reached into his pocket and brought out a folded slip of paper. "Thirteen," he said. "See! I bought it . . ." He stopped, his eyes on the sales slip.

The entry read: "*1 distil. Complete — $49.75.*" Above was his name and address: "*Richard Javelin, Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio St.*"

That was correct. But there was an error above the name.

The date.

The information clerk's voice said: "If you'll let me see the sales slip . . ."

She took it from Javelin's hand, glanced at it, then inhaled sharply. "You say you made this purchase *yesterday?*"

"Yes," said Javelin. "On the thirteenth floor."

The woman drew a deep breath and raised her head. "Mr. Ungerman!" she called in a loud voice.

A heavy-set, balding man with a red carnation in his coat lapel came up. "Yes, Miss Sundstrom?"

"This gentleman," began the information woman, then frowning, thrust the sales slip into Mr. Ungerman's hand. "Just take a look at this!"

Mr. Ungerman looked at the sales slip and looked at Javelin. "One of our old type sales slips. What did you want to know about it?"

"I bought that merchandise yesterday," Javelin said. "I want to see the salesclerk who sold it to me."

Mr. Ungerman's lips formed a great pout, which moved in and out. "Umm, yes, I see. You say you, ah, made this purchase *yesterday?*"

"That's right."

"Umm, and what is wrong with it?"

"Nothing. I haven't even received it yet. It's just —"

Mr. Ungerman reached out and touched Javelin's sleeve — lightly. "Would you mind stepping this way, please?"

He smiled unctuously and moved off, looking over his shoulder to see that Javelin was following. Javelin trailed him to the elevators, then into a narrow aisle that led to a paneled office door.

Mr. Ungerman opened the office door and stood aside for Javelin to enter. The room contained a mahogany desk and a battery of steel files. A heavy-set man with a cigar in his mouth sat behind the desk.

"Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman

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said, "an unusual, shall we say, situation has arisen. This gentleman has one of our old sales slips here — one which we haven't used for years — and maintains that he made the purchase only yesterday. He asks for a refund —"

"I'm not asking for any refund," Javelin snapped.

"No?" asked Mr. Bailey. "Then what's the beef?"

Javelin's eyes narrowed. "Store dick, eh?"

"Store protection service," Mr. Bailey said smoothly. He held out a meaty hand and Mr. Ungerman, pressing forward, put the sales slip into it.

Mr. Bailey took one look at the piece of paper. "Nineteen thirty-two!" he grunted. "That's a helluva long time ago."

"The clerk made a mistake," Javelin said, savagely. "I got that slip yesterday."

". . . And one of our old time sales slips," Mr. Bailey went on. "What's this? '*1 distil. complete — $49.75*'?" He looked up at Mr. Ungerman.

Mr. Ungerman raised his shoulders expressively.

"It's a distilling outfit," Javelin said.

Mr. Bailey's eyes gleamed. "An old Prohibition still?" He appealed to Mr. Ungerman. "Do we still sell them?"

"I haven't seen one in years."

"They went out with Repeal. I thought so." The store detective got to his feet. "Just what's the game, Mister?"

"There isn't any game," Javelin said, tautly. "I'm not trying to get a refund. I'm not trying to swindle the store. I want to see the sales clerk who sold me this outfit. Is there any law against that?"

"Why do you want to see her?"

"I made a date with her. She didn't show up. They tell me it happens right along, but it's never happened to me before. I want to ask her why she stood me up."

"Oh, do you, now? And you figure the store should help you, eh? The customer's always right. Well, Mr. Jav'lin, or whatever your name is, The Bonanza Store has a rule — salesgirls can't make dates with customers and visy-versy. I mean, salesmen can't make dates with customers."

"You're quite right, Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman interposed. "But this matter is, ah, shall we say, beside the point. That sales slip is sixteen years old. I would like to know how Mr. Javelin got it."

"I told you," Javelin said, through bared teeth. "I got it yesterday. On the thirteenth floor, where I —"

"There is no thirteenth floor in this store."

"So I've been told. Nevertheless . . ." Javelin stopped. The store detective was tapping his forehead and winking.

"You think I'm crazy?" Javelin asked, suddenly sober.

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"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as that, Mr., uh, Javelin. But if I were you, I'd just run along quietly and not cause no more trouble." Bailey beamed at Javelin. "That's a good fella, huh?"

Javelin looked at him then turned slowly and looked at Mr. Ungerman. The floor manager's face was set in firm lines.

"All right," Javelin said. "Give me the sales slip and —"

"Better leave it here," Mr. Bailey said, smiling wolfishly. "Just so we don't have no trouble, eh?"

Javelin turned on his heel and walked out of the office. But he did not leave the store. There was a staircase beside the bank of elevators. He climbed the stairs to the second floor.

It was quite obviously devoted to feminine wearing apparel, but Javelin roamed it from one end to the other, then crossed it back and forth, going down each aisle.

When he finished he climbed to the third floor. He searched every nook, boldly looked at the faces of the salesgirls — and floorwalkers. From the third floor he went to the fourth and on up. Shortly before noon he reached the eighteenth and top floor and discovered that it was devoted entirely to the offices of the store. The general offices.

Grimly, he approached a reception desk. "I'd like to see the owner of the store."

"Mr. Orpington is the owner," the girl behind the desk smiled. "But naturally, you don't want to see him."

"Oh, but I do."

"You have an appointment?"

"No, but I want to see him, just the same."

"You'll have to make an appointment."

"All right, make one."

"You'll have to see Mr. Clemson about that. Mr. Clemson is his private secretary."

"And how do I see him?"

"I'll call Mr. Clemson's assistant, if you insist, but I don't think it'll really do you any good. . . ."

"Call him."

The girl hesitated then picked up the phone. "Mr. Myers." She looked up at Javelin. "What is your name?"

Javelin told her. The girl said into the phone: "Mr. Myers, there's a Mr. Richard Javelin here would like to make an appointment with Mr. Orpington. . . . Yes, Mr. Myers." The girl winced a little, then addressed Javelin. "About what did you want to see Mr. Myers?"

"I don't want to see Myers. I want to see Mr. Orpington. On a personal matter." Then Javelin added hastily, "Of vital importance."

The girl spoke into the phone. "He says it's a matter of vital importance. . . . Very well, sir."

She hung up. "Mr. Myers will see you. Straight down the aisle, Number 3."

Javelin nodded thanks and passing

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the receptionist's desk, walked down a corridor between pine panelled offices until he came to one with the number "3" in gold paint.

He opened the door and stepped into a sumptuously furnished office, with a great mahogany desk. A bald, shriveled little man sat behind the big desk.

"You're the man wanted to see Mr. Orpington? About what?"

"A personal matter."

"Could you give me a general idea of what it's about?"

"No," Javelin said, bluntly. "It's personal."

Mr. Myers drummed lean claws upon the polished surface of his desk. "This is very irregular, if you don't mind my saying so. Mr. Orpington *never* sees anyone without an appointment."

"I was told that his private secretary makes the appointments."

"Mr. Clemson? So he does." Mr. Myers smiled thinly. "But it's my job to, well, sort of screen the calls before . . . What did you say your name was? Javelin . . . ?"

"Yes. Richard Javelin."

"*Richard* Javelin!" Mr. Myers brightened. "You wouldn't by any chance be the noted anthropologist?"

"I'm an anthropologist, yes."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Myers. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance. My hobby is natural science. As a matter of fact, I subscribe to *Current Geography* and I read your article on the tribes of the Upper Amazon . . . a very interesting piece, if I may say so."

"Thank you, Mr. Myers."

Mr. Myers got nimbly to his feet. "Oh, it's a pleasure, Mr. Javelin, a real pleasure, I assure you. I understand, from your article, that you're contemplating another trip up the Amazon, to study the culture of the . . ."

"That's why I'm here."

Myers blinked at Javelin. "Indeed? You want to see Mr. Orpington about your Amazon trip?"

Javelin nodded.

"But Mr. Orpington isn't interested in that sort of thing. I know a great deal about his tastes and —"

"Just the same, could I see him?"

Mr. Myers hesitated, then suddenly came around his desk and stepped to a door leading to an inner office. With his hand on the knob he stopped. "I'd like to talk to you again, Mr. Javelin."

"— After I see Mr. Orpington."

Mr. Myers opened the door and popped into an office twice the size of his own. A white-haired man of over 70 sat slumped in a huge leather chair, behind a tremendous desk.

"Mr. Clemson, this is a friend of mine," Myers said. "He'd like very much to talk to Mr. Orpington about an exploring trip he's going to make, to the Upper Amazon. . . ." He stopped.

A door at the side of Clemson's office opened and a fierce-eyed old man stepped out. He was probably near 80, but had the vigor of a man

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many years younger. He was slightly stooped, but even so, towered well over six feet.

His eagle eyes fixed upon Javelin. "You want to see me about an *exploring* trip?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Orpington," Javelin said, quickly. "Mr. Myers got it a little wrong. I want to see you about a purchase I made here yesterday."

"What's that?" Orpington roared. "You want to see *me* about something you bought here?"

"A distilling outfit — on the thirteenth floor."

"You have the nerve to come to me about a trifling purchase? With a complaint department downstairs, a return department and one hundred and forty-seven other departments, you brazen your way —" Orpington's voice did a sudden change. "You say, *on the thirteenth* floor?"

"On the thirteenth floor," Javelin repeated firmly. "A floor that apparently does not exist in this building. Yet —"

"A distilling outfit?" Orpington cut in. He whirled on his private secretary, Clemson. "Do we carry distilling outfits?"

"No, Mr. Orpington," the private secretary said, tonelessly.

"Did we ever carry them?"

A full second passed before the secretary answered. "Yes."

Orpington's eyes were fierce once more as they fixed themselves upon Javelin. "Let me get this straight; you say you bought a distilling outfit here — in my store — yesterday? On the thirteenth floor?"

"That's right. I had a sales slip, but it was taken from me by the store detective. And a Mr. Ungerman."

"Shall I call them up?" Mr. Myers asked.

Old Alf Orpington brushed away the suggestion. His eyes still remained on Javelin. "Go on!"

"That's about all. Except that the salesclerk made a mistake and used an old sales book. At least that's what the men downstairs claim. Also, she wrote in the wrong date . . . 1932."

"*What day in 1932?*"

"October 14 . . ."

The light went out of Orpington's fierce eagle eyes. A film seemed to sheath the orbs. And Javelin could have sworn that a shudder ran through the gaunt old body.

Orpington said: "The salesgirl . . . what was her name?"

"Miss Carmichael. As a matter of fact, I, well, I made a date with her and when she didn't show up . . ." He smiled wanly. "I haven't been in Chicago very long. I returned from South America only a short time ago and Miss Carmichael . . ."

"Miss Carmichael," Orpington said in an odd tone. "When you talked to her, was she . . . alone?"

"Not exactly. That's what struck me as odd. There was only one other person on the floor, a floorwalker. . . ."

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"His name?"

"I don't know."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall, rather handsome; maybe twenty-eight or thirty . . ."

"Dark hair?"

"Why, yes. All the time I was buying this distilling outfit, he stood there, watching us . . . me. . . ." Javelin stopped abruptly, for Orpington had suddenly turned away from him and walked back into his office. The door swung shut.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Javelin. "If this isn't the —"

"If you don't mind, Mr. Javelin," said the aged private secretary, "Mr. Orpington isn't feeling very well. . . ."

"Neither am I," retorted Javelin. He whirled on his heel and stalked out of Clemson's office, through Mr. Myers' and down the corridor between the paneled offices.

In Clemson's office, Mr. Myers and Mr. Clemson looked uneasily at one another. Neither said a word. Then the door of Orpington's office was jerked open and the store owner popped out. "That man who was here —"

"He's gone, sir," said Myers.

"Call him back. I want to know how he got to the thirteenth floor — what elevator he took?"

On the eighteenth floor, Javelin pushed the pearl button for an elevator. The door of #12 opened and the familiar freckle-faced operator grinned out at him.

"Going down, sir!"

Javelin stepped into the elevator. The door closed . . . and Javelin plummeted eighteen floors, to his death.

From the Chicago *Bulletin*, October 14, 1948:

MAN KILLED IN MYSTERY DEPARTMENT STORE ELEVATOR PLUNGE

Richard Javelin, noted Amazon explorer, today plunged to his death down an elevator shaft in The Bonanza Store. Mystery surrounds the death of Javelin as his death was caused by falling down the shaft of an elevator that has not been in use for 16 years. Odd angle is that the elevator, Number 12, was sealed and locked from public use exactly sixteen years ago today, when it crashed, carrying to death three persons: the youthful elevator operator, Mickey Brown, a salesgirl, Elaine Carmichael and Henry Orpington, son of the Bonanza Store owner, Alfred Orpington, who at the time was learning the business and working in capacity of floorwalker on the thirteenth floor. After his son's death, Alfred Orpington sealed up the elevator and changed the numbering of the thirteenth floor to fourteen.

How Richard Javelin got into Elevator #12 today is being probed by police and store officials. . . .

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It's been much too long — over a year — since Idris Seabright appeared in F&SF. For our older readers, I need only calloo that one of our ablest authors is back with us again (and you'll find more Seabright stories here very soon). For newcomers, I'll let Judith Merril perform the introduction. Seabright stories, Miss Merril writes in her recent anthology HUMAN?, *are "highly individualistic, and often disturbingly poetic. . . . The lady has a wicked knack for undercutting the pretensions of her fellow humans, and for silhouetting against an alien background the most* human *of our weaknesses." As she does once more, with a characteristic blend of irony and beauty, in*

Change The Sky

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

"IT WOULD BE AN EXPENSIVE WORLD to make," said the artist. He rolled a lump of play putty into a rope, coiled it up on itself, and whacked it down on his drawing board. "From what you say, you'd want lots of flowers . . . and women. That would come high."

"It isn't women I want," Pendleton said stiffly and a little wearily. "I've been to many worlds with beautiful, willing women. I'm not asking you make me some sort of lustful paradise. What I'm hunting is a place that's so beautiful, or so winning, or so *right*, that I'll feel, 'This is the place in the whole universe that I love best. This is home.'"

"Um." The artist bounced his putty on the floor a couple of times. "Tell me about yourself," he said without looking up. "I don't get many clients like you, you know. Most of them are people who aren't physically able to go starside and visit the worlds in person. It's unusual for somebody to come in here who's done much traveling."

A shadow crossed Pendleton's face. There was no use in telling the artist, but he himself wouldn't be physically able to go from world to world much longer, hunting the one right place. He'd had deceleration sickness badly in his last berth, when he was purser on the *Tyche*. Two more trips, and he'd be done for. If he hadn't found what he was looking for by then . . . It was that knowledge that had brought him into the artist's atelier.

"I've spent most of my life in

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space," he said unwillingly. "There isn't really much to tell."

The artist raised one eyebrow. "I doubt that. For example, I gather you're a traveled person. Which one, of the various worlds you've visited, has seemed to you the most beautiful? Or the most appealing? Or interesting? And so on."

"Genlis is the most beautiful, by far," Pendleton answered. "It's a water world, with deep green, swelling, foam-laden seas, and a sky so intensely blue that it's almost purple. On the islands — there are a few islands — tall graceful trees like palms lean into the wind, and the perfume of the flowers is so sweet it makes you dizzy. There are flowers everywhere. They say that no matter how far you get from land on Genlis, you can always smell the flowers. The air is soft and yet fresh, and when the wind blows against your face or body, you feel your skin tingle with delight.

"Nothing could be more beautiful than Genlis. But there aren't many people on that world, and after I'd been there a few days I felt lonely. I was glad to get back to the ship."

"So perhaps it wasn't *your* kind of beauty," said the artist. He was punching crescents with his thumbnail in his putty lump. "Which of the worlds you visited seemed to you the most interesting?"

"Oh . . . Kruor, I think. It's a long way from its primary, and there's nothing on its surface but snow and ice. The snow is very soft, for some reason, and when the wind blows — there's a great deal of wind — it carves the snow into caves and grottoes and long pointed arches that collapse if you stamp your foot.

"The nights on Kruor are very bright. There's an ionizing layer in the atmosphere that gives the sky a constant glow like a night with a full moon on earth. When the snow arches and caves sparkle in the glow, like a million diamonds, it's a fine sight. Then the green sun comes up, and the surface of the snow caves melts a little and turns to ice. You should see the sparkle then! It almost blinds you. Usually it snows again before night. Kruor is a most interesting place."

"You say it was interesting, but you seem to have thought it was beautiful," the artist commented. He had shaped his lump of play putty into the torso of a tiny woman: round breasts, dimpled belly, long full thighs. "Now, which of the worlds you've visited seemed to you the most appealing? I mean, gave you most nearly the sensation that I gather you're looking for?"

There was a long pause. The body of the miniature woman the artist had shaped sank slowly back into the play putty as the resilient stuff resumed its natural globular shape. "I've liked a lot of places," Pendleton said at last. "There was a world called Phlegra that was nothing but volcanoes and geysers. The planet's magnetic field was funny, and sometimes an eruption from one of the

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geysers would just go on up. Hours later you might be hit in the back of the neck by an icy spray. — But I suppose that's not what you meant."

"No," the artist said. His eyes swept Pendleton's face.

The older man's gray cheeks colored faintly. He rubbed his forehead with one hand. "Well, there was Asterope," he said. "I don't know what I liked about it, actually. It was a quite ordinary world. But there was a great deal of electrical activity on the planet, and there'd be a dozen thunder storms in twenty-four hours. Once I was out in one of them at night. I took cover in a sort of hollow in a cliff, and watched the lightning. There'd be a great flash, and the sky would turn blue-black — the sky on Asterope was very dark, with almost no stars — and the leaves of a funny little tree with white leaves would blaze out in the flash like the stars that were missing in the sky. Then it would be dark again until the next flash.

"Asterope wasn't an appealing world, like Phlegra. But during that storm I liked it. I almost felt at home there."

"Um-*hum*," said the artist. He had put down his lump of play putty and was drawing something on a piece of paper with a brush. When Pendleton tried to see what the picture was, the artist covered it quickly with one hand. "You said something about Earth. Have you spent much time here?"

"No, I was nearly thirty when I came here for the first time."

"That's unusual. Were you born on one of the colonial planets?"

"No, I was born in a spaceship. And I'd never set foot on anything larger than an asteroid until I was nineteen."

"Go on, please. This is the sort of background stuff I've got to have."

"Um — well — my mother died when I was two. Of course I don't remember her. I suppose she must have been the sort of person my father was. I don't imagine she wanted a child very much."

The artist crumpled up the sketch he had made. "Go *on*, Mr. Pendleton. What was your father like?"

"He — well — I haven't thought about him in years — he was a sort of a fanatic. He wasn't unkind to me, actually, but he was a strict disciplinarian, and reserved and remote."

"What was he a fanatic *about?*"

Pendleton laughed. "As I said, I hadn't thought of him in years. Why, he had a theory that the culture of the whole solar system was derived from Xeres, the planet of Aldebaran, originally, and he went from asteroid to asteroid looking for evidence to prove it. I understand that historians consider the theory quite preposterous. But father had a private income large enough to let him indulge his whims. As I said, he spent his time searching asteroids."

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"How did he die?" the artist asked softly.

Pendleton gave a sort of start. He glanced sharply at the artist, but the younger man was looking down at another sketch he had begun to brush.

"I can't imagine why you want to know that," he observed. "— It was on an asteroid. Father thought that the Xerian colonists had landed originally on the planet that later broke up to form the asteroid belt, and that by the time they got around to settling on Earth and Mars, their home culture had become too diluted to look much like that of Xeres any more. What he was hunting for on the asteroids was an artifact of unmistakable Xerian origin.

"This asteroid was less than a kilo across, and only very roughly round. I don't suppose it even has a number in the asteroid catalogue. Most of its surface was rough and irregular, but in the middle of all the bumps there was a very smooth, shallow pit — made, I suppose, by a fusing meteor impact.

"Father was looking over this pit with one of the hand lights, and I was inside the ship working an astrogational problem he'd set me. I was just seventeen.

"Suddenly, through the ship's speaker, I heard him give a great cry. 'Son! Son!' he called. 'I've found it! Come and see!' He only called me 'son' when he was pleased.

"I climbed into my suit and ran out. He was almost too excited to be able to talk. 'I've found it,' he kept saying over and over, while the hand light shook in his hand. 'I've found it. The proof. An adahn.' "

"What's an adahn?" asked the artist.

"It's an ellipse with a cross in the middle. But the long arm of the cross is another, very flattened, ellipse. It looks something like a drawing of a toy gyroscope. It's a characteristically Xerian element of design.

"I looked down where the hand light was bobbing. At first glance there did seem to be an ellipse in one side of the pit. But when you looked closer you saw that it was just a bunch of fortuitous cracks. The inner ellipse, in particular, was missing. There was nothing there but a collection of feathery lines. It was unmistakable once you noticed it.

"I hesitated. I didn't know how he'd take my doubting his discovery. 'Father, look again,' I said. 'Check it. You want to be absolutely sure.'

" 'I *am* sure,' he answered. 'An adahn! Real proof! See, there's the outer ellipse — and there's the inner . . .' The confidence in his voice died away as he tried to trace out the shape.

" 'I —' he said, 'I can't stand it — it's been so long —' He gave me a terrible look. The light fell out of his hand. Then he clutched at his chest and keeled over. He'd had a heart attack.

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"I got him back in the ship and did what I could for him. I couldn't think of much to do. I held ammonia under his nose, and so on. But he died. He was dead within ten minutes after he keeled over outside. He was still glaring at me when he died."

"What happened after that?" asked the artist.

"I had a public guardian appointed for me. Most of father's income stopped with his death. I went to school for a year. Then I got a berth as third officer on a tramp freighter. Father had insisted that I learn astrogation thoroughly, and I didn't have any trouble getting it. I've been in space ever since.

"When father was alive and I was with him, I used to think that when I was grown up I'd go straight to the most beautiful spot in the universe and stay there — the place that was home. I hated the ship and the asteroids. I never thought I'd have trouble finding the place."

"No, you haven't found it," the artist agreed. He folded the sketch he had made and put it in the breast pocket of his tunic. "I've got an idea for a world for you," he said. "I m not going to tell you what it is, because I'm pretty sure you'll say it won't work, and I'd like to try whether it will. One thing, it won't be an expensive world to make. Do you want me to try?"

"How much?" asked Pendleton.

The artist named a sum. It wasn't, Pendleton supposed, much according to his standards.

Pendleton hesitated. But after all, what else could he do? He wasn't a young man any more, and the world — the *real* world — he was hunting for might not exist. "All right," he said. "When will it be done?"

"Oh — today's Monday. Um . . . let's say a week from today, at about the same time. Right?"

"It looks like an out-size egg," Pendleton said.

The artist laughed. "That's only the sheathing. And an ovoid is the most economical solid for it. After you're in you'll lose all sense of the shape. Have you ever been in an artificial world before?"

"No."

"Well, for it to be fully successful there has to be some cooperation from you. After you enter — pierce the shell of the egg — there's a period of preparation and acclimatization that's partly physical and partly psychological. There's a gas in the air, for example — but I don't want to give away trade secrets.

"Abandon yourself. Don't resist. And don't try to hurry things. It takes a little time. The preparation will come to an end eventually. And then you'll be in your world."

"Suppose I don't like it, or, after I've been in it a while, decide I've had enough. How do I get out? The same way I got in?"

"No." The artist handed him a metal circlet. "Put this on your wrist. After you've had enough of

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the world I've set up for you, press the stud in the middle of the wrist band. That will initiate the reverse acclimatization — a sort of decompression period. It's nothing abrupt, like going through a door."

"If I like the world, can I visit it again?"

"Of course. Sometimes I leave worlds set up for months, even for years. All you have to do is to pay me a small rental fee."

"Do people ever — live in them?"

The artist frowned. "Now you're getting into something . . ." He fished the lump of play putty out of his tunic pocket and began squeezing it. "You see, what we artists make are worlds that seem absolutely real. And yet, of course, they're artificial. They're artistic creations. And like other artistic creations, they seem at times to have a life of their own.

"In this trade of mine, you hear stories. Stories about people who've got into worlds and stayed there, somehow, after the power sources were cut and the world was dismantled. Permanent worlds, some people call them.

"They're just stories. I don't believe them myself, I don't know anyone who does believe them. And yet — it might be possible. I just don't know."

Pendleton had withdrawn his attention when he heard the note of negation in the artist's voice. He studied the enormous bulging golden bulk — the big end of the egg — that lay before him. "I hadn't realized it would be so big," he said. "Your worlds must take a great deal of room."

The artist laughed. "They do. That's why I have my workshop out here, miles and miles from anywhere. But — Mr. Pendleton, I think you're stalling. You're hopeful, but you're nervous about your world, too. Go ahead and enter it."

"How?"

"Just walk up and push on the sheathing. It's made to give at any accessible place. And remember what I said about not trying to hurry the acclimatization period."

Pendleton swallowed. He was more excited than he had thought he would be. His knees felt uncertain and weak. His mouth was very dry; he swallowed again. Then he walked resolutely toward the golden sheathing of his world.

It gave on a minimum of pressure. A puff of air — salty, and yet somehow smelling disagreeably of violets — went past his face. Pendleton had time to wonder irritably why the artist hadn't simply provided his world with a door, instead of electing this fantastic sort of ingress. Then he stepped inside.

It wasn't so absolutely dark as he had thought it would be, though he couldn't see any trace of the break in the sheathing through which he had come. There was a mist — salt-and-violet-smelling, but quite dry — around him, a dirty sepia mist that moved in eddies of black

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and charcoal, and he had the dim impression that somewhere to the right was a little hill.

He took a step forward uncertainly. There was a blaze of orange-colored pain behind his eyeballs, and the tincture of light died away entirely, leaving him in a blackness that was hard to breathe. Ahead — behind? — a bell rang with a high, mocking note.

A train of rhomboids bobbled past him in the darkness at eye level. They were brightly colored, reds and yellows, and lit like paper lanterns from within. Pendleton was suddenly furiously angry. He put up one hand to stop the swimming rhomboids, and received a paralyzing shock in the palm of his hand for his pains.

He put his hand down, swearing. What was it the artist had told him? — to relax, to take it easy, to cooperate. But perhaps his getting angry had been a part of the cooperation. It was difficult to say.

Something hard, long, and thin slipped into his still tingling hand and was withdrawn again. He looked down. The rest of his body was invisible, but his two feet — such big feet — were to be seen dimly glowing with their own blue light.

He wanted to laugh. He wanted to sit down; he was tired. But his body was too stiff to bend, and besides his dim blue feet were too far off for him ever to be able to reach them.

A string of luminous blue and purple circles, much paler than the rhomboids had been, came down at him from above. He regarded them passively, and after a moment or two they hauled themselves up again. The darkness seemed blacker than ever after they had gone, and when he looked down at his feet they had disappeared into the general night.

An irritable impatience invaded him. How much longer was this foolishness going to continue? Nobody named Pendleton — and there was a man named that — ought to have to put up with it. Cooperation — relaxation — would mean sitting down and letting himself rest.

And all the time he wasn't walking, but his legs were carrying him on.

The darkness was withdrawn gradually, as if someone were pulling a curtain to one side. Pendleton drew a deep breath and rubbed one hand over his face. His sense of personal identity had come back to him, and with it the stirrings of curiosity. Where would he be? Would it be in his own world?

He stood on a plain — wide, bleak, sulphur-smelling — before a cliff with a dark opening. Far off to his left there was a liquid quaking, a dark stirring against the drab plain, and he knew the flicker of motion must be from a lava pool. It did not interest him greatly, but the dark opening drew him. He wanted to go in.

He had no light. Or — why, yes,

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there was a hand torch strapped to his belt. He hadn't noticed it before. He drew the torch from its fastening, flicked the switch, and for a moment sent the beam of light up and down the dun-colored surface of the low cliff. Nothing. He stepped inside the dark hole.

He almost cried out in surprise. He didn't know what he had been expecting, exactly — some grand cavern, perhaps, with sheeted stalactites and answering stalagmites, cascades of intricate frozen stone tracery in translucent amber and mauve, rivers, vaulted ceilings, and in the end an underground sea. What it actually was was that he was standing inside a hollow, perfectly polished and absolutely spherical, of black basalt. The jet surface reflected the light of his torch dizzily.

At the side of the bubble of stone was another opening. He went through it and stood in another basalt sphere, a little smaller than the one before. Down low in its side there was another hole.

The third bubble was larger, so large that the beam of the torch was remote over his head. The next bubble was smaller, and so was the one after that. Pendleton went from bubble to bubble, not bored, not unhappy, not thinking, in a relaxed mindlessness that was not quite a trance. Sometimes the exits were so low and narrow he had to crawl to get through them, sometimes they were ample and commodious. There was always another bubble to succeed the one in which he stood.

It came to him that the artist had spoken truly when he called this a world. It would be possible for Pendleton to go on from sphere to sphere throughout the rest of his life, and he would never come to the end of them. The artist had made him a world. Pendleton neither liked nor disliked the fact.

The bubbles were alike. Large or small, they were alike. Polished and black and perfect and pierced by two openings. But in the sixtieth bubble, or it might have been the two hundredth, or the thousandth lacking one, the beam of his torch picked up an irregularity on the black, lens-smooth surface. He leaned forward to look, wholly incredulous. And it was, it was. There had been incised, in grayish lines against the polished blackness, an adahn.

An adahn. For a moment a deep emotion stirred in him. He drew back from it, afraid, unable to name it. It was as if a great depth of water parted, and showed him something undreamed of at the quick. He stood transfixed, leaning against the curving basalt, unable to move.

Then the emotion was gone, and though he sent the light of the torch over the symbol again and again, it didn't come back. After a little he sighed and went into the next sphere.

Its surface was unmarked, mirror-smooth, as that of all the others but one had been.

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Pendleton couldn't have told how many bubbles later it was that he stopped, admitting finally that the coldness in his heart had grown into despair. He could, of course, go back through the bubbles to the one with the adahn, and beyond it to the hole in the dun-colored cliff where he had come in. He could walk over the plain to the lava pool. There might be other things on the plain, interesting things, besides the lava pool. He didn't want to. There was nothing here for him.

His fingers had already pressed the stud.

The decompression period was quite different from what that of acclimatization had been. The basalt bubble around him seemed to fracture into a thousand jagged pieces, each glinting with the reflection of the torch he held in his hand. The pieces began to recede from each other with increasing velocity, faster and faster, as if blown outward by some explosion of which he was the center. He felt that filaments of himself were being blown out with them.

When the pieces were very far away, they softened and melted into a grayish haze. Pendleton stood motionless in the haze for what seemed a very long time. Doubt as to who the man called Pendleton was assailed him. He did not recognize his thoughts.

The haze brightened to a silvery pearl gray, as if a light were shining behind it. Pendleton felt an instant of desperate giddiness. Then it passed and he was himself again. He was standing outside the egg.

The shell was intact. How he had got in — and out — without breaking it was no odder than anything else had been. But — Pendleton's mouth drew into angry lines as he realized what had happened — but what had made the artist shape such a world for him? How could he possibly have thought that an endless series of black basalt bubbles was what Pendleton was looking for?

He glanced around him. The artist was nowhere to be seen. Pendleton must have been in the world for a long time, for the sky over it had grown quite dark, and floodlights had been turned on down at the end.

No, the world had been a ridiculous failure. All that money . . . all that time . . . all that hope — wasted. A ridiculous fiasco. He'd find the artist and have it out with him.

With long, angry strides he started toward the shack where the studio was. The surface of his mind was seething with anger. But there was bitter, almost unendurable, disappointment in his heart.

The studio was empty. On one of the big drawing tables an envelope was propped up. Pendleton's name had been brushed in large flowing characters on it.

He tore the envelope open. The note read:

Dear Mr. Pendleton —

You have been in your world for

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so long that I am beginning to hope that I have succeeded in making what you want. (The cave element, of course, came from what you told me about the snow caves on Kruor, and the adahn and the polished sides of the bubbles from the pit on the asteroid where your father met his death. I deliberately disregarded what you said about Asterope, except for the glitter in the lava pools. It seemed to me that it was too conscious to be of much help in constructing a suitable world for you. I hope my choice of construction elements was wise.)

If you read this before midnight, won't you please call me at ZEN dorf 0329? I am anxious to know how you came out.

Sincerely, Byrd.

Pendleton grimaced. It was an explanation; the artist had, he supposed, done his best. He was still angry. He called the number Byrd had given him.

A party was going on; he got Byrd after a little delay. The artist peered at him sharply in the viewing plate. He whistled. "It wasn't an unqualified success," he observed. "Judging from your face."

"It wasn't a success at all," Pendleton replied grimly.

"What kept you so long, then?" Byrd asked. "People usually come out right away when a world's not right."

Pendleton had been placed on the defensive. He didn't like it. "The succession of bubbles had a, um, hypnotic effect," he answered. "But it wasn't at all what I was looking for."

"No part of it?" the artist asked. He sounded rather deflated. "Not even the adahn, for example?"

Pendleton's lips set in a thin line. "None of it," he said.

"Oh." Byrd was frowning. "I'd thought I might be able to develop . . . but I guess not." He cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr. Pendleton, I don't think there's any point in our wasting any more of each other's time," he said. "I'd like you, though, to get in touch with another artist, a man named Selim Zweig. He doesn't do much constructing, and he's difficult to work with. But I think he can make what you want if anybody can. Have you got the name? Selim Zweig."

"Yes," answered Pendleton. He started to hang up.

Something in his face seemed to alarm Byrd. "Wait!" he cried. "Don't do anything foolish! Let me come and talk to you. I—" But Pendleton had already broken the connection.

No, he wasn't going to do anything foolish, he thought as he walked down the grassy lane toward his copter. He wasn't, for instance, going to get in touch with the Selim Zweig Byrd had suggested to him. There was a disgust that was as bitter as gall in his mouth. He was done with fantastic artificial worlds and the men who created them. Tomorrow he'd make ar-

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rangements to leave Earth. There were still plenty of real worlds, starside, that he hadn't visited. Tomorrow he was going to ship out.

They took his application at the hiring hall next day. His references, his experience, were splendid, they assured him. They sent him in to the doctor for the usual physical examination. And Pendleton didn't pass.

He was stunned. For half a day he couldn't believe it. Starside was gone, he'd never ship out again, he was stuck on earth. He'd never find the world he had been hunting for so long. It was too late.

He passed two days in misery so acute that it made him want to groan aloud. Then — it was inevitable — he called Selim Zweig.

Zweig was a little man, as ugly and restless as a monkey, and Pendleton disliked him on sight. None the less it was easier to talk to him than it had been to Byrd. He didn't like him, but he trusted him.

He told him much the same things he had told Byrd. The details were a little fuller, that was all. Zweig listened, cracking his knuckles and nodding peremptorily from time to time. When Pendleton had finished, Zweig scratched his head and grinned.

"Sure, I can make you a world," he said. "Won't cost much, won't take long to make. Sure."

Pendleton felt a thrill that was not all hope, though he didn't know what the second emotion in it was. "But — will it be right?" he asked anxiously. "Will it be what I've been looking for? A place where I'll feel at home?"

"Um-hum. You bet. Sure will."

Pendleton gave him a searching look, but the artist kept on grinning. There wasn't anything else Pendleton could do. "Go ahead and make it," he said.

Zweig called on the third day to say that the world was ready. His workshop was even more remote than Byrd's, and yet it seemed to Pendleton that he got there almost before he wanted to. He walked across the field to the workshop with long steps that were eager and yet a little hesitant. Now that the realization of his dream was so near, he was unsure.

"That's it," Zweig said, pointing. He indicated a big grayish sheet of something that looked like wrapping paper and was stretched across an arch in the area behind his studio.

"There's nothing behind it," Pendleton objected after a moment.

"Oh, yes there is."

"Byrd used an egg."

"Well, I don't," Zweig answered. He grimaced and scratched himself on the chest. "An egg's a purely mechanical limitation, and besides. . . . That's it."

Still Pendleton hung back. "Oh, for God's sake," Zweig said irritably, "go on in. The acclimatization's all been taken care of. Go in!"

Pendleton walked forward and pushed against the sheet.

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He fell through. That was the only way he could have described it: he fell through. He fell for quite some little time, and ended with a cushioned thump on what seemed to be a rubber pad.

The impact of his fall seemed, momentarily, to have shaken the wits out of him. He didn't know who he was — no, that was all right; he was Bruce Pendleton — or where, or why. He felt around on the rubber pad with his fingers blankly, as if he expected contact with it to resolve his difficulties. Then he got to his feet.

He was at one end of a long, tall, metal-lined corridor. It was lit at intervals by inset golden fluors, and the air in it seemed to vibrate to a low, constant hum, almost too deep to be heard.

The locale was hauntingly familiar, and after a second Pendleton realized what it was. He was on a ship, and the ship must be in space, since the low constant hum could come only from its anti-grav.

A ship, certainly, but a ship for giants. The proportions of the corridor — length, height, even the size of the fluors — were quite unlike what Pendleton was used to. Only people of enormous stature could pilot such a ship.

He pressed his hands over his eyes and tried to think. There was something about a man . . . a little, ugly man, like a monkey . . . who'd made something . . .

He couldn't capture the thought, and after a second he didn't think it mattered. But he understood about the ship. It wasn't that it was unusually large, it was just that he himself, Bruce, wasn't very tall.

Halfway down the corridor there was a direct-contact viewing plate set in the ship's wall. Bruce Pendleton stopped in front of it. He did that whenever he went along the corridor, because he loved to look out at the stars. It was like looking out of a cave into paradise.

How beautiful they were! Against the intense velvety darkness of space they burned, they seemed to glitter and flash with a blinding sparkle, more bravely than a billion diamonds would have done. He knew *that* was illusion; stars in space don't glitter, they burn with a steady light. But they did seem to blaze out at him.

And each one was a sun, an unimaginable furnace, and around each sun were its unimaginable worlds. One of them, Pendleton knew, was more beautiful than all the others, and that one was his own world. It would take time; he had to wait. But sooner or later he was going there.

At the end of the corridor a door was set flush in the metal sheathing. Bruce hesitated in front of it. His right hand ran over his left wrist uneasily. It seemed to him there ought to be something on his wrist . . . not the little chronometer, but something else . . . a metal circlet with a . . . with a . . . But he

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couldn't think what it was, and he'd better not spend any more time puzzling over it. He'd dawdled enough in the corridor.

He rapped on the door, as he'd been taught, and waited until he heard the deep voice saying, "Come in." Then he opened it.

The desk was piled high with books and papers, but the big man's face lay in shadow. There was a pool of shadow around him on the floor.

"Well, son," he said without turning, "have you memorized your astrogation tables thoroughly? I've just finished a most interesting book about the adahn in Mayan culture, and I can spare you a few minutes. Do you want to recite the tables to me now, or would you rather wait until tomorrow morning? I don't want to hear them unless you know them thoroughly."

The lines of anger and unhappiness had faded from around Pendleton's mouth. His face had become young and timid and hopeful, a forward-looking, eager face.

"Well, sir," he said doubtfully to the man who was his father, "I thought I knew them pretty well. But maybe I'd better wait until tomorrow before I try to say them for you, sir. Yes."

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Recommended Reading:

The Best Science-Fantasy Books of 1954

by THE EDITOR

SCIENCE FICTION HAS LED A VARIable course since it became a part of general trade publishing in 1949 — several years of pretty level coasting, then a decided upswing (in both quantity and quality) in 1953, and now an equally decided downswing in 1954.

To be sure, a very few more titles were published in 1954 than in 1953 (an increase of 4%, to be exact); but this increase was not a healthy growth of new material. The two departments of s.f. publishing which waxed were paperback first-book-publication of old magazine novels, ranging from mildly satisfactory down to plain awful, and of course anthologization — which, for reasons to be examined detailedly later, cannot possibly continue to represent such a large proportion (over a third) of the s.f. publishing business.

It seems reasonably clear (though whenever a reviewer utters those words, he does so with the suspicion that the year ahead will prove him a liar) that science fiction has, for the time being, reached the limits of the audience that it can attract as a specialized field, that that audience is not nearly so large as that of the mystery or the western (s.f. sells a few more copies per title, but far fewer titles), and that there is too much talent, editorial and auctorial, now devoted to this specialty for the field to support. To put it in theatrical terms, the gross just isn't enough to pay off adequately so large a cast.

And still they come. . . . One major publishing house (Dodd, Mead) has already launched a new s.f. line, and at least two others (Harper and Putnam's) are preparing to do so. And of course some new magazines are announced for 1955.

Meanwhile other publishers (notably Simon & Schuster) have dropped their specialized s.f. lists, and many magazines have passed out of existence. It's become a rather nervous game of musical chairs — as it might be played electrically at Sing Sing.

NEW S.F. NOVELS

In all other branches of fiction, anthologies and volumes of collected short stories are incidental; and the new novel is the backbone. But in 1954's s.f., new novels (which

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in 1953 accounted for about half the titles published) slipped to a third, included nothing to rival the four or five top books of the previous year, and averaged out so poorly that, whereas in the mystery a "Best Ten" list always means an arbitrary choice among at least twenty logical candidates, a science fiction "Best Ten" would be flatly impossible.

But if 1954 produced no MORE THAN HUMAN or BRING THE JUBILEE, it did offer seven markedly rewarding novels. Three of the leading young writers — Poul Anderson, Richard Matheson, and Chad Oliver — wrote first-adult-s.f.-novels in which they (and particularly Anderson) gratifyingly lived up to their distinguished achievement in shorter lengths. Old hands Hal Clement and Isaac Asimov easily outdid any of their previous efforts in, respectively, the creation of alien life and the fusion of future science with the simonpure detective story. A newcomer from another field, business-satirist Shepherd Mead, indulged in unusually lively and shrewd extrapolation; and Edgar Pangborn turned a masterly handling of an old theme into the richest s.f. novel of the year. Recommended:

BRAIN WAVE, by Poul Anderson (Ballantine, 35c)
THE CAVES OF STEEL, by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, $2.95*)
MISSION OF GRAVITY, by Hal Clement (Doubleday, $2.95*)
I AM LEGEND, by Richard Matheson (Gold Medal, 25c)
THE BIG BALL OF WAX, by Shepherd Mead (Simon & Schuster, $3.50*)
SHADOWS IN THE SUN, by Chad Oliver (Ballantine, $2*; 35c)
A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS, by Edgar Pangborn (Doubleday, $2.95*)

OLDER S.F. NOVELS

Most of the magazine serials revived in book form were readable but hardly distinguished; the middens have been pretty well picked over by now. But two novels of past seasons, now reissued in slightly revised form, are of such all-time-classic stature as to rank in importance above most new books:

PRELUDE TO SPACE, by Arthur C. Clarke (Gnome, $2.50*; Ballantine, 35c)
TO WALK THE NIGHT, by William Sloane (Dodd, Mead, $2.75*)

S.F. SHORT STORIES

Of a dozen collections of the work of individual authors, most suffered from indiscriminate inclusiveness, containing too many previously reprinted stories and stories quite unworthy of reprint. But books by Russell (the year's best single volume of shorts) and Sheckley avoided both these pitfalls; and those by Brown and Kornbluth averaged such high quality that one could reread with pleasure the few familiar entries. Don't miss:

ANGELS AND SPACESHIPS, by Fredric Brown (Dutton, $2.75*)

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THE EXPLORERS, by C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, 35c)
DEEP SPACE, by Eric Frank Russell (Fantasy Press, $3*)
UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS, by Robert Sheckley (Ballantine, $2.50*; 35c)

S.F. ANTHOLOGIES

Here is, as I indicated before, the great weakness in s.f. publishing. There were 25 anthologies in 1954, 8 more than ever before and well over twice the average of preceding years. Aside from the 4 anthologies devoted to new material, 21 anthologies reprinted 386 stories totaling over three million words.

More than half of these stories were, inevitably, chosen from the so-called "Big Three" magazines: *Astounding*, *Galaxy* and *F&SF* (the rest coming from assorted slicks, pulps, "little magazines," and no less than 33 other s.f. publications). Now the "Big Three" combined publish only around two million words of fiction a year, and much of that wordage is devoted to book-length novels. Obviously anthologies are trying to use up the better fiction even faster than it's published; equally obviously, the result is wearisome overlapping and frequent anthologization of stories which have no business claiming book-form permanence.

It's astonishing, under these circumstances, that almost a quarter of 1954's anthologies deserve recommendation, and a great tribute to the talents of their editors. Veteran anthologists Conklin and Merril and novices Brown and Reynolds did splendid research among neglected treasures of the past; the always admirable team of Bleiler and Dikty found a distinguished rival in August Derleth for selecting the top stories of the year just gone by; and Pohl, as usual, discovered a first-rate batch of never-published stories. Recommended:

THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES: 1954, edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty (Fell, $3.50*)
SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL, edited by Fredric Brown and Mack Reynolds (Shasta, $3.50*)
SCIENCE-FICTION THINKING MACHINES, edited by Groff Conklin (Vanguard, $3.50*)
PORTALS OF TOMORROW, edited by August Derleth (Rinehart, $3.75*)
BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME, edited by Judith Merril (Random, $2.95*)
HUMAN?, edited by Judith Merril (Lion, 25c)
STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, NO. 2, edited by Frederik Pohl (Ballantine, $2*; 35c)

NON-FICTION

A rash of books on space travel, aimed chiefly at highschoolers or at adult novices, produced only one distinguished entry, Coombs's vivid study of today's aircraft as forerunners of the space future. Among other factual books of interest to s.f. readers, only Daniel Lang and

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the infallible Willy Ley succeeded in combining literacy and clarity with wholly absorbing scientific material.

SKYROCKETING INTO THE UNKNOWN, by Charles Coombs (Morrow, $4*)
THE MAN IN THE THICK LEAD SUIT, by Daniel Lang (Oxford, $3.50*)
ENGINEERS' DREAMS, by Willy Ley (Viking, $3.50*)

FANTASY NOVELS

The relatively few entries in "pure" fantasy were of high average quality — and one may even argue the "purity" of the books by Laski (a horror story of time travel) and Kerr (a detective comedy with ESP).

But wholly unrelated to s.f., and wholly wonderful, are Anderson's adventurous epic and Eager's study in the logic of magic (issued as a juvenile, but as delightful to adults as Nesbit or Carroll). Long and even cumbersome though it is, the Tolkien may well be the year's most distinguished work of imagination.

Recommended:

THE BROKEN SWORD, by Poul Anderson (Abelard-Schuman, $2.75*)
HALF MAGIC, by Edward Eager (Harcourt, Brace, $2.75*)
UNDER THE INFLUENCE, by Geoffrey Kerr (Lippincott, $3.50*)
THE VICTORIAN CHAISE LONGUE, by Marghanita Laski (Houghton, Mifflin, $2.75)
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, by J. R. R. Tolkien (Houghton, Mifflin, $5*)

FANTASY HUMOR

At least one respect in which 1954 topped previous years was in the number of truly superb books of imaginative cartoons, from the grotesque warmth of Kelly and Giovanetti to the macabre bite of Addams and Searle. Don't miss a one of these:

HOMEBODIES, by Charles Addams (Simon & Schuster, $2.95*)
MAX, by Giovanetti (Macmillan, $2.95*)
THE INCOMPLEAT POGO and THE POGO STEPMOTHER GOOSE, by Walt Kelly (Simon & Schuster, $1* each)
THE FEMALE APPROACH, by Ronald Searle (Knopf, $3.50*)

MODESTY FORBIDS . . .

I hope some of you may choose to put on your own "Best" lists the 1954 books which originated in these pages. As a reminder, they are:

THE BEST FROM F&SF: THIRD SERIES, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas (Doubleday, $3.25*)
THE STAR BEAST, by Robert A. Heinlein (Scribner's, $2.50*)
ONE IN THREE HUNDRED, by J. T. McIntosh (Doubleday, $2.95*)
THE SINISTER RESEARCHES OF C. P. RANSOM, by H. Nearing, Jr. (Doubleday, $2.95*)

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered from F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details see page 2.

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E. C. Hornsby once described himself as "a moderately successful businessman by day and a moderately successful author by night." Some years later he ruefully instructed an editor to delete the phrase "moderately successful" from both professions, and added, "I am about as many inches round the waist as I have years of life, and about the same number of hairs on my head. Shudder and pass me by. It were kinder thus." There's nothing moderate, however, about his success in this deftly devised tale of precognition and telepathy, with a twist as unexpected as it is just.

Overlooked

by E. C. HORNSBY

THE DOCTOR, WHO WAS IRISH BY birth, looked reflectively into his glass and a twinkle from its amber depth was reflected in his grey eyes.

"None of you chaps would remember Billy Bates?" he said and glanced round. "No, I thought not; before your time. Billy was the nicest little chap you might ever have met; a chubby little cherub of a fellow. All men liked him and all women wanted to mother him, although none of them ever took him seriously enough to want to marry him.

"One night at this Club we were talking of close shaves we had had, and some of us had been in some pretty queer spots, when Billy chips in to say he'd been nearer to death on three or four occasions than any of us.

"Knowing that he'd never been anywhere in his life wilder than Margate in the season, we smiled.

" 'And did you live?' asked one of the boys.

" 'Yes,' said Billy, seriously. 'You see I was watched over.' " And then he told us:

The first incident had happened some years previously when he was a lad working in the City and living in a suburb on the eastern side of London, which we'll call Stanbury. The electric line had just been run out there and one night Billy was sitting in the front coach of a tube train on his way home. Most of the people had got out at the last stop and he thought he was alone in the compartment, but he was busy reading his paper and hadn't noticed properly.

Presently he got the idea he was

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being watched so he put down his paper and there was a woman sitting right opposite him. She had a very white face and sunken eyes which were nothing but black hollows and she was looking at him so intently that, embarrassed, he hurried to hide behind his paper again.

But he could still feel her watching him and at last he had to look again. This time she stretched out her hands to him imploringly, and the idea jumped to his mind that she was a bit queer in the head.

"Good Lord," he thought, "I'm going to be involved in a scene."

She opened her mouth in a torrent of words. But the surprising thing was he couldn't hear a sound. It was like watching somebody behind a pane of plate glass. He might have thought himself deaf except that the noise of the train crashing along was going on all about him. Then he thought that perhaps she was dumb.

He looked up and down the carriage but there was nobody else in it, only the woman and himself.

As if despairing of making him understand, she jumped to her feet and walked agitatedly up and down the compartment. Every time she drew near to Billy she flung out her hands imploringly, brought her face to within a few inches of his, and each time there was that silent rush of unspoken entreaty.

Then she went to the door leading to the driver's cab; you know it, it's green painted and there are a couple of little steps leading up to it and a notice saying, "Keep this Doorway clear." She vanished through it.

Billy stared after her, wondering what he ought to do.

After a bit she came back. She was wringing her hands as if she had failed there as well.

The train was drawing up at the stop before Stanbury. The doors opened and to Billy's relief the woman got out on to the platform.

All he wanted was for the door to close between them and leave her behind. But suddenly she turned and beckoned to him. It was both so imperious and so imploring that he obeyed instantly. The doors were closing as he dived between them and he had to hold one back as he struggled free. The train moved off and the guard standing at the open door of his compartment shouted at Billy for having forced the door back.

When Billy turned, the platform was empty and the woman gone. He was left to wait ten minutes for the next train and thought some pretty hard things about his own stupidity.

The next train came in but it did not move off, being held at the platform by the signals. Eventually word came through.

There had been a signal failure and the train Billy had been in had been switched on to a wrong track and had crashed full pelt into a stationary train. The motor man had been killed and the front coach completely wrecked.

Billy didn't say anything to any-

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body about the woman; he didn't understand it himself and didn't expect anybody else to. He was a very normal little chap and didn't want anyone to think him otherwise.

He put the incident out of his mind and then two or three years later he was waiting for a bus one winter's night. It was a miserable night; it had rained earlier and had partly frozen so the roads were very treacherous and the bus was a long while coming. Still, Billy didn't mind. He was at the top of the queue of some dozen people and reckoned he ought to get a seat. Meantime, he read his paper. It was full of reports of smash and grab raids of which there had been a wave at the time and Billy thought indignantly that something ought to be done about it.

Then he had an impression of somebody coming along. Instead of going to the tail of the queue this person stopped alongside him. Billy thought it was somebody going to "jump" the queue so he turned to glare, and there was this woman again, dead white face, deep-set eyes and all. There was the same silent outrush of words, the same imploring gestures of the hand. The odd part was that nobody else seemed to notice. They all read their papers or talked to each other, or just stood looking hopeless and patient like people in a queue do.

The woman paced up and down the queue; then, in extreme agitation, she beckoned to him.

Again there was something about it he couldn't resist. He left his place at the head of the queue. The others looked surprised but just shuffled one place up. He hurried after her as she moved off and then, as she still kept ahead, he took to his heels and fairly ran.

"I'll catch her this time," he thought, "I've got to get to the bottom of this."

But she vanished round a corner and when he got there a second later there was not a soul to be seen.

He turned back to the bus stop; one part of his mind was badly shaken and kept saying to him: "Billy, you're going balmy," and the other was annoyed in a commonplace fashion that he had been such a fool as to give up his place at the head of the queue.

And then down the street came tearing two cars; the one at the back which was trying to draw level was a police car, with its sign flashing on and off and its gong banging. The car in front was nearly up to the bus stop when it skidded and ran amok. It charged the pavement and ploughed through the queue. Billy could hear screams, saw people falling right and left, and then the car hit a shop front. There was a crash and a burst of fire and a second of even more terrible silence.

"Nothing," thought Billy, trembling, "nothing could have saved me if I'd still been there. Nothing."

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And then he wondered *what* thing it was that had actually saved him.

He thought a good deal about the two incidents after that but he wasn't thinking of them at all when the third incident happened for it came up so unexpectedly, right out of a blue sky.

He was on holiday just before the war. He left his hotel one morning and in easy stages walked beyond the prom and on to the sands until he reached a sheltered cove. He stretched himself out on the sands and presently dropped off to sleep. When he awakened he was on an ever-diminishing mound of sand with the sea all about him. He couldn't swim and the sea which earlier had looked so quiet and peaceful was now roaring and tossing about like a lion waiting to be fed.

"I mustn't lose my head," thought Billy, and knew that he was not far from sheer blind panic.

Everything was so normal; there were the cliffs and the sea, the rooftops of some bungalows a little way inland, and a few streaks of smoke on the skyline. All exactly as he had seen so many times. The only difference was that now he was *in* the sea and presently would most undoubtedly drown.

Then he saw a figure on the edge of the sea. Although she was in the shadow of the cliff he knew her instantly. She beckoned to him again and pointed. The path she pointed out seemed to be where the sea ran roughest but he obeyed without question to find that a raised bank of sand ran just at that point and no more than knee deep in water he splashed and floundered his way to safety — and an empty beach.

The last occasion was in the early part of the war during the daylight Blitz when he left a public shelter at her beckoning and went out in the face of the barrage despite the remonstrances of the shelter warden. A couple of hours later, passing the spot, he saw the result of a direct hit.

We didn't know whether to take Billy seriously or not, although he seemed to take it seriously enough himself. We asked him if he recognized this guardian angel of his and he said no. We suggested all sorts of females of our acquaintances as fitting the post, and grew pretty hilarious.

"She's not a young woman, you chaps," said Billy, blushing like a schoolboy. "She's quite old, old enough to be my mother."

So we invented a Sunday school teacher named "Miss Higginbotham," for whom he had had a crush in his youth and who by reason of her saintly life on earth had been appointed to watch over his later life. We even pretended to see her standing with her harp over by the bar and suggested Billy stand drinks all round on her behalf.

Billy took it all in good part

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although I think he had revealed a lot more than he had first intended, and he made an excuse to get away.

When he had gone an elderly man, newly amongst us, said reflectively:

"The woman nearest to a man, whatever his age, is always his mother. I suppose it couldn't have been his mother?"

There was a silence.

"Have I said something?" he asked, glancing round. "Is his mother dead? Surely even that might be accepted too, presuming, of course, you admit the supernatural?"

"His mother's still alive," somebody said awkwardly. "In fact, Billy still lives with her."

"Besides," added somebody else, "you remember he said he didn't recognize her."

And with that we closed the matter with a minimum of embarrassment to all concerned.

Not that there was anything wrong with Mrs. Bates. She was a mountain of a woman with a heart of gold. But it was just utterly impossible to associate her with anything spiritual. She had started life helping on her father's barrow in an East End kerb market and had finished up owning a chain of fruit shops; between those two points, she boasted, she had never bought or sold anything that wasn't good sound honest stuff. The same could be said for her herself.

Have you noticed how everything that is to happen seems to send its herald a day or two in advance? You wake up thinking of somebody's name and you go out into the street and come face to face with them; any of you can multiply such experiences by the dozen.

In this case I might have known something would follow in the wake of Billy's story, but when it did come along perhaps I could not altogether be blamed for not recognizing it at first.

I was called to a Miss Treadmere. She lived in a gaunt Victorian house in the old part of the town. On the one side factories had gradually encroached and further along the houses had been pulled down for flats. Only one or two of the old houses remained like aged spinsters in old-fashioned clothes and peculiar hats, things for derision or pity, soon to be elbowed aside.

I was shown first into a sort of parlour on the ground floor; there was a strong masculine flavour about it; all the furniture looked heavily male, there were pipes in one of those pipe-racks you so seldom see nowadays, a roll-top desk in a corner and even a brass-mounted safe. A portrait of an implacable gentleman with a ruthless mouth under a heavy moustache looked sternly at me from the walls. A nervous looking lady, apologetically faded to a mere shadow, looked forlornly from another frame. I thought it might be Miss Treadmere but it was her mother.

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A scaffold pole of a woman took me up two steep flights of stairs to a little sitting room and there I made the acquaintance of Miss Treadmere, or the husk that her dear father had left behind.

She might have been pretty at one time but I doubt if she ever had the deeper beauty that character gives. I could have imagined her in youth petulantly resentful of parental control, but it had been so thoroughly stamped out of her that she had become the very high priestess of the monstrous Juggernaut that had crushed her. At every second word she quoted her father, said what he would approve and what he would not approve, how wise he had proved in denying her this little happiness or that little pleasure. As I listened to this self-revelation I found myself listening for a heavy tread on the stairs. Then suddenly, and with utter amazement, for so strongly did he live in her, I realized that Mr. Treadmere was dead and had been dead for a good ten years.

There was nothing much wrong with Miss Treadmere, except general debility as her paper-white cheeks proclaimed but I think she liked our little chat and I dropped into the habit of a regular call, although, poor soul, she was the dreariest company.

One night in the downstairs parlour, before the remorseless glare of her father and the shadowy nothingness of her mother, Miss Treadmere confided her story to me.

She's dead long since or I would not be telling you this now, but I fancy the dead care little about the secrets they leave behind on earth.

She had had a wilder youth than I had ever imagined; she had run off with a man and her father's door had been closed against her in the approved fashion of the day. She had married this man and had a child by him but he turned out a despicable scoundrel. He had obviously married her thinking she had means of her own and then vented his subsequent disappointment on her. Finally he was taken up by the police and amidst a welter of other charges it came out that he was married already.

Miss Treadmere found her way back to the parental home. Perhaps old Treadmere was so gloomily triumphant at this vindication of his judgment that he desired to have her about the place as a perpetual trophy like big game hunters mount *their* trophies. More likely, that faded lady his wife having quietly faded out of everything a little previously, he wanted a housekeeper. He took her back, but he made his terms. The child — and he described it in round Biblical terms — should not enter his house but must be given away, or sold in the market place. He dealt with that side of the affair himself and Miss Treadmere resumed her maiden name and crept submissively about, drooping before that awful eye and shivering before that fearful frown.

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"Sometimes," said Miss Treadmere, gazing out of the lace curtains at the dreary yellow brick wall opposite, "I wish I had not come back here. If I had had courage to go on and earn my own living — only I didn't know how. But I might have kept my boy. Strange —" she said, shaking out an imaginary fold in the rustling curtains with a hand almost as transparent, "strange to think now he would have been old enough to keep *me* — if he had wanted to, of course."

"And you've never seen him since?" I asked.

"No," said Miss Treadmere with a sigh. "Father saw to that. He was adopted by somebody. I never knew who it was."

She was tired and I had to help her back to her room.

"How the evenings draw in," she said. "It's winter again. It always seems to be winter."

She busied herself amongst her tea things but her mind was elsewhere.

"I said I'd never seen my boy again, doctor," she said. "That's not true; at least it is and it isn't. You'll think I am queer in the head, but at times I do see him — when he is in danger."

So there it was — the second half of the affair Billy's yarn had heralded; coming along to meet me.

"Go on," I said, on tiptoe as it were.

"I go off in a sort of dream and I come to at a catastrophe — a car smash, a train wreck, or a bombed building. It's like looking at the end of a book first. Then I turn backwards as it were and start at the beginning. I see him, my son, in a train, and I know it's the train that's going to smash, or I see him standing on the pavement at the very spot where the car is going over it. I beg and implore him to turn aside, to come away. He takes no notice. I cannot make him hear my words. Oh, that is terrible, when he cannot hear me —"

"And then?"

"At the very last, when I am in despair, I beckon him to me like this —" She made a gesture of indescribable supplication with her still beautiful hands. "It is then I seem to pierce the curtain. He sees and obeys. Thank God each time he has obeyed."

"How do you see him?" I asked. "As a man? Does he alter?"

"No," she answered, "I see him just as my little baby. How else could I see him for I have never seen him otherwise? I think that is why he knows this gesture, for so, when he was learning to walk, I would hold out my arms and he would always come to me."

I said nothing to her, but as I went down the stairs I apostrophized the dear departed Mr. Treadmere.

"Well, you old swine," I thought, triumphantly, "so you wouldn't have her child in the place? We'll see about that, now, and what are you going to do about it?"

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I was passing the open door of the parlour, and there was the picture of Mr. Treadmere. He was glaring at me with the most insane resentment. I knew of only one reply; I'm sorry to say I made it.

I went round to see Mrs. Bates. She was very guarded and indeed hostile at first but eventually I gained her interested sympathy.

"It's a fact I adopted the boy," she said, "but you might have heard that anywhere. It's a fact that there was an old gentleman — a hard old brute if ever there was one. But it was all done through a firm of lawyers —"

"Trender, Fairburn, and Trender," I suggested, remembering the name of Miss Treadmere's solicitors.

"Yes," admitted Mrs. Bates, looking surprised. "But it was agreed that if Bert and me were to have the boy never were we to communicate with anybody about it again. The old gentleman put a big sum of money in the bank but Bert and me had our pride no less than his, and we never touched it. Now, how do you come into this?"

I told her and she melted largely and generously.

"Poor soul," she said. "Mind you, I'm not giving up Billy; he's mine and always will be. I've been more of a mother to him than she ever has, and he'll be the first to acknowledge it. But there's no reason why she shouldn't see him. I'm sure she'll always be welcome here whilst she makes herself welcome. There's only one thing, though —" and her cheerful face fell, "I'm not sure how Billy will take this. You might not think it, but he's sensitive as a girl at heart."

"Billy and I know each other pretty well," I said. "Let me have a word with him. Is he home yet?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bates, "been in an hour or more, but he was sleepy and went to lie down — unusual for Billy."

"I'll go up and see him," I said and made my way upstairs.

He was sitting on his bed, rubbing his eyes in a dazed way.

"Been asleep?" I asked.

"Yes," he agreed, confusedly. He looked at me strangely. "Doc," he burst out, "when I was talking at the Club about the woman that I see sometimes, you didn't believe me, did you? No, I know you didn't, it was in your face. But I wasn't leg-pulling. What's more I've seen her again — this evening."

I sat down and looked at him. He was flushed and wild-eyed but otherwise perfectly normal.

"This time it was different," he continued. "On previous occasions I've been awake and she's come to me. This time I went to her. It was when I got home. I suddenly felt terribly sleepy so I came up here to lie down for a moment. I must have dropped off. I came to in a room — not this room, although otherwise it was just like waking up in the

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normal way. She was there in a chair before the fire. I think she's been ill or something for she was in a dressing-gown and slippers."

"Did you notice much of the room?" I asked. "Could you describe any of it?"

"Yes I could," he replied promptly and then proceeded to describe the very room I had stood in an hour before.

"There was a big grandfather clock in it," he added. "There was a scroll and in it the name 'Jno Rawlings, London' and the date — 'A.D. 1685.' "

I was startled; there was no doubt about that. I had had particular cause to notice that clock for it had come up in conversation between Miss Treadmere and myself.

"I saw it was nearly 7 o'clock," said Billy. "I sort of stood there looking on as if it were a stage scene and something was going to happen. I noticed her lift her head as if listening. I thought I heard something myself outside the door, like somebody coming up. She stood up and went to the door. Then it came to me that if she went through that door something terrible would happen. I called to her again and again to stop but she didn't heed. I remember wringing my hands, and then I flung my arms out to her in one last entreaty, like she used to to me. I believe that must have reached her for she stopped with her hand on the door. She turned her face and looked at me and you've no idea of the turn I got. There was a great bruise on her forehead and blood running down her face and dripping from her chin. Then it cleared and she looked normal again. She gave me a superior sort of smile like you give a troublesome child, turned and went out. Then it happened."

He shivered and rubbed his hand over his forehead.

"I heard her cry out. Then there was a yell. It wasn't her voice. It wasn't any human voice I've ever heard or want to hear. You can't imagine the rage, venom, and fear, that were all jumbled up together in it. I heard her scream and there was a crash. That woke me up. I've been sitting here ever since. I feel sick." He looked at me dolefully. "I suppose I'm going off my rocker."

"I don't think so," I said and then as casually as I could I told him my news. He listened, his eyes unwavering. I think in his own shy commonplace little soul he was a real Sir Galahad where women were concerned. I saw chivalry flash in his eyes. He was all set to idealize this unknown mother of his.

"I must go to her," he said finally, springing to his feet and then he stopped. "But that last business. Something terrible has happened to her."

"No," I cut in, "not *happened*. Perhaps still to happen unless we can stop it. Look, it's only 6:15 now. You said that the clock showed seven. My car's outside, we may still be in time."

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We pounded downstairs and into my car. Fortunately it still had one of those sticker labels with the word "Doctor" on it that we used during the war and that saw us through where otherwise we might have been pulled up for I might tell you I took some chances.

We turned the corner of the road with a good quarter of an hour to spare and Billy gave a gasp.

"Look," he said, with a groan.

There was an ambulance and a couple of official looking cars outside the door.

We went up the pathway. The door was open. There was a little group of men in the hall. At the foot of the stairs was the huddled body of Miss Treadmere.

A man, the police doctor I guessed, was kneeling down by her. He lifted her head gently as we came in and there was the white face with the big bruise on the forehead and the dried blood plastered down to the chin, just as Billy had described it.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"It's hard to make out, sir," a police sergeant said, "for the lady was alone in the house. Her woman found her at the foot of the stairs and called us in. We found a tuft of cat's fur on the landing upstairs and what we think happened is that a stray cat got in. The lady must have heard something, come out and fell full tilt over the thing in the dark and headlong down the stairs."

I was looking beyond him, through the open parlour door to the pictured face of Mr. Treadmere. It may have been my fancy, but I thought he looked uncommonly pleased with himself.

Then I heard Billy's voice behind me.

"But it isn't 7:00 yet," Billy said.

"It was by her watch," said the Sergeant and pointed. Despite the smashed glass, we could see the hands of the watch had stopped at a few minutes after 7:00.

Later when we went upstairs and saw the grandfather clock the explanation came to me. I remembered why we — Miss Treadmere and I — had discussed the clock. It was the last day of summer-time and Miss Treadmere had said that as she was going to bed early she would alter the clocks straight away. But like many other ladies of advancing years she had become confused. Instead of putting the clock back an hour she had put it on 1:00.

"But what I can't understand," said poor Billy, "is why she wouldn't heed me. I've always taken notice of her warnings, haven't I? I'm sure she heard me and yet she just ignored it."

"Well, Billy," I said to him, "the way I see it is this. Her warnings to you were, shall we say, supernatural. But when you expected *her* to take notice of *you*, that wouldn't have been supernatural, that would have been against nature itself. For I've never yet heard of any parent who took the slightest heed of anything their children said."

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James Blish has, at one time or another, displayed a comprehensive knowledge of just about anything — from the effect of the Heisenberg Principle upon alternate universes to the comparative use of orchestral crescendos in operas by Verdi and Berg. But in no other story that I know has this Pennsylvanian polymath demonstrated such a terrifying insight into the darker reaches of the human soul as in this uncomfortable tale of evil and justice.

The Book of Your Life

by JAMES BLISH

PETRIE MAPES AND THE BOOKSELLER looked over the counter at each other with a suppressed and freezingly cordial hatred. It was practically the only *over*-the-counter transaction which ever passed between the two.

"Browsing?" the bookseller said, acidly.

"This time. You don't have anything new for me, I suppose."

"No. Didn't expect you."

"Naturally," Petrie said. "What about that Frank Harris autobiography? It's been on order now for two months."

"Not yet," the bookseller said. "My source was raided. Did you know that the postal inspectors measure this stuff by weight, just like a letter? My outlet was charged with possession of 30 pounds of obscene books. Books by the pound!"

He sat down again behind the counter, his eyeshade shadowing nearly his whole face. "I've a newish Henry Miller here. All about how his mother-in-law —"

"I've seen it," Petrie said shortly. "Synthetic stuff, doesn't come up to either of the *Tropics*."

He moved off, touching a book here and there on the cluttered stalls. He did not, of course, expect to find anything of interest on the open shelves. He had not expected to be in the dark little East Side bookstore at all on this specific day. He had come as a last resort, after an afternoon meeting of the National Association of Mystery Publishers, of which he was secretary-treasurer. The meeting had broken up unusually early, leaving him faced with the likelihood that he could drive back to Fire Island in time to have dinner with his wife — a rather hangdog end for a day alone in the

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city, a day with a built-in alibi to boot.

He had phoned the only bachelor girl he knew any longer — for that matter he had never known many, for Petrie's youth had been nearly as ascetic as his inner life was vivid — but no one had answered the phone on either try. Though he had not even talked to the girl in over a year, he was surprised to feel a knife of jealousy: doubtless she was being taken to dinner by some unencumbered young man, and then, and then . . .

As always in such moments of rebuff, his mind swung automatically to the world of vicarious experience, where every woman is available. He had learned long ago that he could not bring himself to buy a silk-stocking magazine from a newsstand in the plain sight of the world, and on the few occasions when he had been driven into one or another of the "art"-photograph outlets along Sixth Avenue, he had been driven directly out again by the pressure of other customers around the boxes of cellophane-wrapped stills.

Then, for a year, he had commissioned a needy pulp-writer to turn him out a 10,000-word story a month, which was forwarded to him from the writer's agent in a neat leather binder. The writer's imagination had proven more than lurid enough, and the whole arrangement preserved Petrie's anonymity — but the publishing business was too wobbly these days to permit Petrie such an expense any more, and the writer had gone back to science fiction. Something of the same kind had happened to a painter in glazes whom Petrie had employed indirectly for a little while, though he had been less satisfactory: he had been even better than Henny South at envisioning exotic situations, but his knowledge of anatomy had had some woeful gaps in it — for one thing, he had the odd notion that the female skeleton had distinct breastbones.

But there were always books, if one knew where to get them.

Petrie picked up a battered Ellery Queen paperback and looked abstractedly at the cover. It was, of course, a book any citizen could buy openly, and for no more than a quarter. Petrie himself could have come by a copy of the hardbound edition at no cost at all through the NAMP library, but he never did. He liked the smooth Queen style, with its overtones of interest in kinds of literary effect beyond simple violence and suspense, and he liked equally well the cold stimulation of the puzzle Queen posed for the reader just before revealing the solution to the plot. Buying Queen paperbacks in bookstores was, as he knew very well, a ritual directed toward himself, his form of public notice that not all his reading outside of business hours had to nourish that seething jungle of intertwined limbs and ruffled lingerie into which

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his dreams plunged him every night. He sometimes wished, too, that mystery publishing could get back to this kind of writing; the currently popular novels of violence stood too firmly in the middle of the spectrum, between Petrie's public taste and his private one, to do more than irritate him. But that, regrettably, was where the money was.

He tucked the plant volume under his arm and looked back at the bookseller. The man's face was still in shadow and he was sitting quite still in the pool of light, reminding Petrie, as always, of the old man in Stevenson's "Markheim" and, too, of the old woman killed by Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. Only the analogues kept Petrie in control of himself under the bookseller's unarguable, unwavering, incessant scrutiny. Had he been forced to think of the bookseller as a real person, actually looking this fixedly into the real Petrie Mapes, he could never have stopped himself from repeating as well those two fictional killings.

As it was, he approached the counter almost cheerfully, relieved to have found something to buy after all, and abruptly anxious to leave. The bookseller looked up at him, the green shadow lifting like a curtain, but failing to reach his eyes.

"I'll tell you what," the man said, in an odd tone of voice. "I've got something for you after all. Didn't want to sell it, but it's getting too big to keep around here. It's just your kind of thing."

What did the man really know about his kind of thing? But he did know. He knew more than enough.

"What is it?" Petrie said.

"Over here. The big book on the lectern."

Petrie looked at it. It was more than big; it was monstrous. He had noticed it earlier, but had taken it for an old unabridged dictionary. Now he saw that it was much too big even for that.

An oversize book attracts attention even in a large library. Furthermore, in the field of erotica a big book means a plethora of illustrations — and even an incurious, nearly illiterate person like Janet Mapes could recognize such a book merely by opening it at random.

"Sorry, no picturebooks," Petrie said indifferently. "I prefer my own imagination."

"Not so much as a woodcut in this thing. It's solid text. And this is the only copy in the world."

"Don't give me that. Next you'll be trying to sell me the Fourth and Fifth Books of Moses, in his own handwriting."

"Not you," the bookseller said, looking at Petrie sidelong. "I've never tried to sell you a *Necronomicon* or a *Pornoboscodidascolo* or any other fake. This is *The Book of Your Life*, the real thing. I've tried it, and I know."

Probably he did know. The bookseller knew the disease as well as

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Petrie did; that was why he and Petrie hated each other. And he, too, knew where the money was.

"I never heard of it. Who wrote it? I've no time for games."

"Try it."

Suspiciously but with hope, Petrie opened the huge volume at random. The type face was Century Old Style, the paper a tough vellum only slightly yellowed; the book, then, could be anywhere from 50 to 400 years old. There seemed to be acres of type on every page, running in four columns, each one of which was as wide as the full width of type in a modern book.

The style, however, should place it as to century. . . . A phrase caught Petrie's eye. He bent closer.

A drop of perspiration, falling from the end of his nose onto the linen-like paper, ticked him back to consciousness again. He was glad he had worn a topcoat. "Is it — is it all like that?" he whispered.

"No. It has something for everybody. That's the funniest thing about it. The book always opens to the place that will hit the reader hardest. I don't know how the author turned the trick, or what the binder did to help. Something to do with the way different types grab hold of a big book, maybe. But it happens."

"That's nonsense."

The bookseller shrugged. "It works. Don't say I didn't warn you, when you find that all the rest of that book's an anticlimax. That's the way it is. Every man who cracks it, cracks it at the spot that does the most to him. It worked for you, didn't it?"

Petrie, recovering rapidly, felt vaguely pleased that the man's constant watchfulness had resulted in so far afield a judgment. Evidently, having once sold Petrie a copy of *Fantazius Mallare*, the bookseller had decided that Petrie's interests had an occult streak. But that didn't matter.

What mattered was the big book. Nothing Petrie had ever read in his life had affected him so directly as that single passage. The anonymous author of this volume knew things Henny South could not even have dreamed, and had a supernal skill as well. He had filled page 1009 with the purest distillation of lust ever sublimed on paper — and there were thousands more such pages.

"How much?" Petrie said.

"Oh, I'll rent it to you on approval, say a dollar a week. I'll get it back eventually, anyhow. Try it on your friends, you'll have a million laughs. I've tried it on all of mine, or I'd make the price steeper. On all of them but you."

The shadow of the eyeshade made his eyes impossible to see. Mutely, Petrie put a ten-dollar bill on the counter. The bookseller closed the big volume, producing a puff of air with an odd smell of cloves, as if the pages had recently been fumigated. Together, like co-conspirators, they carried the book to Petrie's car.

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The last thing Petrie saw as he pulled away from the curb was the bookseller's smile, dim in the shadow of the doorway, like an inverted echo of the eyeshade. With a sudden rush of fellowship, he smiled back.

Janet, as he had confidently anticipated, assumed that the book was a dictionary. She watched him trundle it into his den with an expression of gentle resignation and went back to her fancywork. He knew that she would never inquire about it again.

There had been a time when he had hoped that Janet would be able to bail him out of the jungle. She had been, and was still, an exquisite ivory-colored girl, long-legged, delicately formed, with smoky eyes and a soft voice which rose and fell as she spoke, almost like singing, almost like Greek declamation, yet too subtly inflected for either; and, almost incidentally, her mind was most penetrating and direct. For a while he had been able to submerge his private hell at least partially in her physical beauty and her capacity for response — and he had begun to see hints that she might assuage him completely if he went about it carefully enough. Any direct appeal for help, he was sure, would revolt her and lose him the chance forever, but with care . . .

He was, he had thought, careful. He had always enjoyed reading aloud, when he was sure of the regard of his audience. He began to read to Janet on occasional evenings, picking first passages in one book and another which he thought she would enjoy, then pages which seemed to strike common chords of emotion between them, and finally edging into fragments which bore — peripherally, to be sure — upon his own agony.

It had been then that she had said, in her sweet, musical voice: "I'm afraid it seems pretty dull to me, Petrie. We're different, that's all. I'm beginning to think you'd rather read about it than do it."

That had been after the Torture-of-the-Senses scene in Hecht's book, a mild enough notion among the many in the cauldron of Petrie's skull, but for her evidently as final as the falling of a portcullis between the den and the rest of the house. Now she would listen to nothing but appalling mush from several of the young poets Petrie sponsored, bending an especial ear over her embroidery-hooks to the vapid sonnets of Cochineal Marsh, while Petrie, falling dizzily back into himself, sat beside the den fire and culled new versions of the old jungle entrapments.

Thus it did not take him long — some six nights of hungry skimming and sudden eager concentration — to find that nothing in *The Book of Your Life* even began to approach the first passage that he had read in the bookstore. Oh, there were enough scenes, scores of them, good enough to give any ordinary novel an under-the-counter reputation

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that would last as long as censorship. There were a few that were so elegantly written as to rival the great erotic texts of India and Japan. But there were no more that spoke with such a wild urgency, and such an immediately consequent spasm of pure delight, to Petrie Mapes.

Much of the rest of the book, as a matter of fact, turned out to be gibberish, and some of that was derivative to boot. One section, for instance, was devoted to fragments from *Het Oude Vletle*, a cycle of Walloon folk-tales rather like *Struwewlpeter*, which had been compiled a century ago under the title *Johannes and the Puppet* by Heinrich Schumann, the so-called Scholar of Orange. The tales supposedly strung themselves together into some vaguely allegorical whole, but Schumann had never been able to collect the whole cycle, so that his compilation remained one of the least-interesting hodgepodges in the folk literature. To be sure, the material from the cycle in *The Book of Your Life* had either been missed by Schumann or had been edited out of the orthodox edition, but otherwise it was unremarkable. It was certainly far less exotic than two thirds of the tales Schumann *had* found and transcribed.

After a week, Petrie was forced to admit the truth. Nonsense or no, the book had indeed opened for Petrie at its highest point of interest for him. Much of the rest of it was remarkable, but also distinctly anti-climactic to that transcendently erotic passage on page 1009. The bookseller had been right. No wonder he had been so certain that he would get the book back from Petrie sooner or later.

This much was proven. With a more abstract curiosity, Petrie turned to the beginning of the big book and began to read it straight through, for sense. It was hard to do. The unknown author wrote in many styles, and there was no reason visible why he should change from one to another at any given point. The book as a whole had the complexion of a novel, involving hundreds — no, thousands, several thousands at least — of characters, each one of whom was approached through the style most suitable to his interests and his state of mind. One of the characters was an educated man afflicted with satyriasis, who emerged at the height of his career on page 1009. . . .

Some of the remaining thousands of states of mind were highly abstruse, some childish, some almost impossibly noble, some so perverse as to be sickening even to Petrie — and some were simply insoluble, not only as attitudes but as writing about attitudes. Where the whole volume was leading its ideal reader could not be guessed. It had, Petrie suspected, a master plan, but no plot that any isolated human reader would ever be able to understand, let alone anticipate.

Delight, bafflement and boredom

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alternated bewilderingly as he turned the huge pages. One conclusion emerged slowly: The bookseller had been right again. There was something in *The Book of Your Life* for everybody.

He was not ready to admit this too until he struck a chapter which should have appealed as devastatingly to his own private hell as had page 1009, but left him instead as little moved as a glacier. It took him a while to discover that the point of view was wrong. The chapter had all the ingredients, but it had been written for a nymph, not a satyr. Or no: for a desperately timid woman whose desire had never escaped from her mind into the world of action.

A female Petrie Mapes.

That was a hard lesson, but Petrie learned it, and thought at once of Helen LeClerc. Helen had once nearly become the woman Petrie had been looking for, but at the last moment she had lost the game, for the same reason that Petrie always lost it. Her verbal promiscuity was a flat sham, a form of compulsive self-torture. The one occasion when Petrie had taken her at face value had been disastrous for both of them. He had hardly spoken to her since, for any kind of failure went down hard with him, but now it appeared that he could pay her back in kind.

It took maneuvering to get her back into the den again, but late one night she arrived. She seemed disposed to resume the role of concupiscent virgin if Petrie would stay in the audience and let her play it by herself. He listened with every evidence of interest to her espousal of nudism — or, as she called it, "naturism" — as the best road back to free, primitive love, and let her fiddle with the ends of her knitted stole without offering to act on anything she said.

She regained confidence rapidly. After a while, crossing her legs for at least the twentieth time, she began to recount as a personal experience something which Petrie recognized as being parroted from a novel by Jack Woodford. She was sure, she said, that it would amuse him.

It did. When she was through, he opened the big book, and read back to her, beginning on page 449. Shortly after he turned the page she got up and walked unsteadily to the bathroom. When she came back, she was blue to the lips, but she would not leave until he had finished reading the whole passage. Then she tottered out through the darkened house without a word.

Three days later, she had begun her novitiate at the Convent of the Immaculate Conception — and Petrie had found out what the big book was for.

The Book of Your Life was an instrument of destruction. It had been Oscar Wilde, Petrie remembered, who had observed that the main danger in a wish is that it might be granted. The big book was

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the ultimate distillation of that proposition. It granted, it fulfilled, it gratified, it fed — and it destroyed. The reason why the bookseller had turned it over to Petrie seemed all too clear.

To test the hypothesis, Petrie tried next the book's mathematical section, not one single line of which meant anything to him. He invited Archibald Smith to the den, not out of any special malice toward Archie, whose confidence in the world around him was hardly more than annoying, but simply because Archie was the only man Petrie knew who might understand Page 202.

He seemed to understand it well enough. Despite his usual affability, and the black Munich beer Petrie had provided, his face froze as Petrie read out the third of the series of expressions, and remained that way for the rest of the evening. It was still frozen the next night, Petrie heard, when Archie's wife found him slumped in a tub full of warm, sticky, bronze-colored water.

It was on that same day that Petrie found the passage that would destroy Janet Mapes.

To Petrie the entire passage — another of those interminable tales from *Het Oude Vletle*, right down to a perfect imitation of Schumann's windy, pseudo-archaic translationese — could hardly have been duller, but all the same he recognized it for what it was without difficulty. The portrait of the imprisoned Margaretha, of the challenge of Antony the Puppet to the castle with its secret rooms, the description of King Jan immersed in filling his throne-room with petrified bric-a-brac that had once been living people — it was all clear enough, even down to the pun on Petrie's own name, with its many-level reference to his researches with the Book, his habit of seeing people as literary characters, and the stone walls which had closed in his life.

Quite clearly, Janet and young Marsh had become lovers. He had only to read the passage to them to accomplish the rest. Guilt would destroy the poet, immediately and almost as a matter of course, for Marsh was already consumed with the fear that he would never in his life write a good poem — which, to be sure, was true — and on the defensive for having taken so much money from Petrie. To be caught as well in a theft of this order from Petrie would push him over the brink in short order.

As for Janet — *The Book* was explicit about her, even through the fog of allegory and the smog of the Schumannesque style. For her, the trail out of Petrie Mapes' house led with shocking directness to a private hell Petrie himself had never dared even to approach: *heroin*. The dream into which Margaretha disappeared at the end of the tale could admit no other interpretation.

Nevertheless, with the double-bladed weapon in his hand, Petrie

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held back. Now that he knew the facts, he wanted nothing better than to bring them both into the den and demonstrate to them how dangerous a man a bibliophile could be — but with the power to do just that available at his pleasure, he hesitated.

It had suddenly occurred to him to be afraid for himself.

Why, after all, had he not been destroyed by page 1009? He had read it repeatedly since he had brought the book home, first for its physical effect, and now out of bravado; but he survived. He had seen himself on that page, but had felt no more revulsion than he could call forth from any mirror. He had always known, after all, that he was a sick and despicable human being — competent, intelligent, diligent, successful, ruthless, fearful, cruel, sex-ridden, self-centered, and essentially dead except in the life he borrowed from books. Had this gruesomely detailed self-knowledge protected him from the flash of ultimate self-loathing which had destroyed Helen and Archie, and which would assuredly destroy Janet and Marsh if Petrie were to let it loose? Did the difference lie in delusion — that Helen and Archie and Janet and Marsh were still struggling blindly to think of themselves as "good"?

Or did *The Book of Your Life* have some death more subtle, more just, and more detailed in store for Petrie Mapes?

Obviously the bookseller had thought so; and probably he knew what it was. It had come down, at long last, to a contest between the two of them, as Petrie sometimes had dreamed that it would.

Grimly, Petrie set out to win it. He was nearly sure that he held several aces. To begin with, the bookseller could not have known him well enough to judge his intelligence accurately. It had to be granted that the bookseller knew the disease, and knew the obstacles to any cure: the conviction that such obsessions are inadmissible to anyone, especially to those who love you; the indefeasible facility at dodging the help you need most; the rewards, which make you more willing to satisfy the disease than suffer the cure; the fear that cure would make another person of you, and the love for the person, diseased or sane, that you have come to think you are . . .

But he did not know Petrie Mapes, and in particular he did not know Petrie *plus* the disease, which added up to a distinct and unique entity. Not even Janet had been able to penetrate to that entity; her very nearly deadly remark — "You'd rather read about it than do it" — had failed to kill because, although she knew Petrie, she did not know the disease: satyriasis is a form of infantilism, arising not out of an abhorrence toward the act of love, but an inability to outgrow the realization that the pleasure in

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the act is vastly over-advertised — an inability to accept the thing as it is as a replacement for adolescent previsions of it. A passion for pornography is not a substitute, but a different thing entirely, though equally unsatisfactory . . . a special case of the permanent disappointment which makes artists of some people, and libertines of others.

All this Petrie knew well; that was his first ace.

As for *The Book of Your Life* itself, Petrie already knew that it was not a killer, but only a weapon. Once you knew how to use it, you could, if you liked, choose *not* to use it — as Petrie himself was holding back the destruction of Janet and Marsh. This might in itself be the key to avoiding the self-destruction which the disease so powerfully urged upon its victims, the self-destruction toward which the Book seemed designed to propel its readers at the flick of a page. Hold back; wait; deny yourself. Impossible advice for an addict of any kind — the whole failure of the Puritan ethos was the failure to recognize that fact. But Petrie was prepared to try it.

Unlike most addicts, he had certain advantages. He had a source of supply — dilute, to be sure, but unfailing. In addition to the books for the sick man, there was Janet for the well man, and Janet remained the only woman in the world who was actually available to him. She would remain so, as long as Petrie chose to hold back his weapon; she might even be pleased at a renewal of interest. As for Marsh — well, if Marsh was necessary to keep Petrie alive, then Marsh would have immunity too. After all, he had only found in one place what Petrie had been seeking on every streetcorner.

Hold back; wait; deny yourself; tolerate; patronize; admire; and, if possible, learn to love. But above all, *have patience.*

And finish *The Book*. He was near the end now, and just beginning to feel a shadow of that excitement he had felt as a child, when he had asked to be allowed to read "just to the end of the chapter" before going to bed.

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

You have read The Book of Your Life. *What is to follow should take only a few pages; every clue you need to contrive your own ending is already known to you, if you have read carefully.*

To read The Book *is a privilege. If you have understood it, you are free from this point on; and the Author salutes you as a master spirit.*

To understand The *Book is a duty. If you have failed to arrive at any of the nine hundred and ninety-nine permissible solutions to the plot by the time you reach this page, the Author welcomes you to his Cast of Characters.*

Success to you; for if you fail, you will greatly complicate The Book;

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but if you succeed, you will simplify it for the next reader, because you were well-imagined.

Think carefully before you turn the page. If you do not, The Book *will devour you utterly.*

The lectern creaked. The bookseller did not turn. He had heard *The Book* return home often enough before; and he knew well enough the name of the new character in it. He could even estimate closely how many pages longer *The Book* would have to be to encompass Petrie Mapes as an essential part of the plot.

The bookseller shrugged and pulled his eyeshade lower over the smoke-filled sockets. This was, he had to admit, a very bad way to write a book.

But until the voraciousness of this one was satisfied, he could hardly afford to begin another. *The Book* had a life of its own; and, as usual, nobody could have been more surprised than the Author.

But he had to admit that it was selling very well.

Coming Next Month

In our next issue, on the stands in early March, F&SF will present two unusually striking and powerful science fiction stories which combine adventurous narrative with provocative thinking: J. Francis McComas' novelet, *Parallel*, in which the science of history solves a strange interstellar riddle, and Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which studies the new role of religion in a devastated future world. In addition there'll be stories by Richard Matheson, Lord Dunsany, Mack Reynolds and others, plus a definitive parody of all s.f. clichés by Chad Oliver and Charles Beaumont and one of F&SF's most surprising historical discoveries — a 145-year-old tale of interplanetary invasion by the creator of Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane — Washington Irving!

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Singly, Poul Anderson is capable of writing the most swashbuckling epics or the most acutely sober science fiction; Gordon R. Dickson can create delightful satire or sensitive mood pieces. But when they collaborate (across half a continent) the result is the most outrageous and charming new creation to brighten s.f. in many a year: the Hokas. This race of eager teddybears, whose pursuit, at once imaginative and literal-minded, of assorted facets of Terran culture threatens the sanity of the Galaxy, first appeared almost four years ago in the deceased magazine Other Worlds. *There and in a sister publication the Hokas duplicated, in their inimitably literal way, the civilizations of the fictional West, of the Space Patrol, and of Victorian England as recorded by John Hamish Watson (complete, inevitably, with a Hokan Holmes). Henceforth, I'm happy to announce, these madcap misadventures, the most cheerfully maddening problems in acculturation that ever faced an interstellar plenipotentiary, will appear exclusively in F&SF, starting with this novelet in which the terrible teddy bears sail the Spanish Main and hoist the Jolly Roger to the cry of*

Yo Ho Hoka!

by POUL ANDERSON
AND GORDON R. DICKSON

ALEXANDER JONES WAS IN TROUBLE.

This, of course, is nothing new for a plenipotentiary of the Interbeing League. His duty lies on backward but promising planets, whose natives he is to guard from harm and guide toward full civilization and autonomy; the position carries the rank and pay of ambassador, and it was only because of his special experience with Toka that so young a man as Alexander Jones had gotten the appointment. His colleagues, stiff dignified men given to dressing for dinner even if they had to wear a spacesuit and to talking about the Earthman's burden, would have pointed out that he was on a comfortably terrestroid world whose inhabitants were not only friendly, but practically worshiped the human race, were phenomenally quick learners and ready to do anything to become accepted into the League.

They would not have understood that this was just what was wrong.

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Alex's lean form strode through narrow, cobbled streets, between half-timbered houses, automatically dodging horse-drawn carriages. The "horses" were dinosaurian monstrosities, but otherwise Plymouth was a faithful small-scale copy of what the native Hokas thought its original had been, circa 1800 A.D., in Earth's England. (This Tokan Great Britain was not to be confused with the one which had been brought up to a Victorian level of civilization; the cultural missions had spotted all imaginable stages of history over the planet, giving the natives appropriate books and equipment, in search of the best starting-point for their education.)

The Hokas who thronged the streets made a respectful way for him, closing in again behind. He heard the awed whispers: "Blimey, it's the plenipotentiary 'imself! . . . Look thar, Alf, ye'll allus remember ye saw the great Jones wid yer own blinkin' eyes . . . . Wonder wot 'e's after? . . . Prob'ly Affairs of State. . . . Yus, ye can see that on the poor lad, it's mykin' 'im old afore 'is time. . . ." The rather squeaky voices spoke English, for the Hokas had enthusiastically abandoned their earlier primitive cultures in favor of the more romantic ways of life the mission had shown them, some ten years ago.

Until you got used to them, they looked much alike: about a meter tall, portly, golden-furred, snouted — more like overgrown teddy bears with hands than anything else. These citizens were variously dressed: cocked hats, tailcoats, knee breeches; burly dock wallopers in carefully tattered work clothes; red-coated musketeers; long skirts on the females; and no few males in striped jerseys and bell-bottomed trousers, for Plymouth was a major base of His Majesty's Navy.

Now and then Alex's lips moved. "Old Boney," he muttered. "I keep telling them and telling them there isn't any Napoleon on this planet, but they won't believe me! Damn Old Boney! Blast these history books!" If only the Hokas weren't so confoundedly imaginative and literal-minded; if only they bothered to separate fact and fiction, stopped taking everything they read and heard at face value. There were times when their solemn conviction (be it that they were Victorians, or cowboys, or Space Patrolmen, or Royal Navy tars) almost hypnotized him.

He turned in at the Crown and Anchor, went through a noisy bar where Hokas sat puffing churchwardens and lying about their exploits with many deep-sea oaths, and proceeded up a narrow stair. The room which he had engaged was clean, though the furniture was inconvenient for a human with twice the Hoka height and half the breadth of beam. Tanni, his beautiful blonde wife, looked up from a crudely printed local newspaper with horror in her eyes.

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"Alex!" she cried. "Listen to this, dear. They're getting violent . . . killing each other!" She read from the *Gazette:* " 'Today the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin was hanged on Tyburn Hill —' "

"Oh, that," said Alex, relieved. "Turpin gets hanged every Thursday. It's wonderful sport for all."

"But —"

"Didn't you know? You can't hurt a Hoka by hanging him. Their neck musculature is too strong in proportion to their weight. If hanging hurt Dick Turpin, the police would never do it. They're proud of him."

"Proud!"

"Well, he's part of this Eighteenth Century pattern they're trying so hard to follow, isn't he?" Alex sat down and ran a hand through his hair. He was sometimes surprised that it hadn't turned gray yet. "That's what's going to be either the salvation or the damnation of this race, Tanni. Their energy, enthusiasm, learning ability, imagination . . . they're like a bunch of children, and still have all the capabilities of an adult human. They're something unique in the Galaxy . . . no precedents at all, and Earth Headquarters expects *me* to educate them into the standard mold!"

"Poor dear," said Tanni sympathetically. "How did it go?" They had flown here only today from the office at Mixumaxu, and she was still a little puzzled as to the nature of their mission.

"I couldn't get any sense out of the Admiralty Office at all," said Alex. "They kept babbling about Old Boney. I can't convince them that these pirates represent a real menace."

"How did it ever happen, darling? I thought the imposed cultural patterns were always modified so as to exclude violence."

"Oh, yes, yes . . . but some dimwit out in space learned how the Hokas go for Earth fiction, and smuggled some historical novels into this sector. Pirates, forsooth!" Alex grinned bitterly. "You can imagine what the idea of swaggering around with a cutlass and a Jolly Roger would do to a Hoka. The first I heard, there were a couple of dozen ships turned pirate, off to the Spanish Main . . . wherever in Toka they've decided *that* is! So far no trouble, but they're probably fixing to attack some place like the Bermuda we've established."

"Criminals?" Tanni frowned, finding it hard to believe of her little friends.

"Oh, no. Just . . . irresponsible. Not really realizing it'll mean bloodshed. They'll be awfully sorry later. But that'll be too late for us, sweetheart." Alex looked gloomily at the floor. "Once Headquarters learns I've permitted a war-pattern to evolve on this planet, I'll be out on my ear and blacklisted from here to the Lesser Magellanic Cloud. My only chance is to stop the business before it blows up."

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"Oh, dear," said Tanni inadequately. "Can't they understand? I'd like to give those bureaucrats back home a piece of —"

"Never mind. You have to have iron-bound regulations to run a civilization the size of ours. It's results that count. Nobody cares much how I get them, but get them I must." Alex got up and began rummaging in their trunk.

"What are you looking for?" asked Tanni.

"That green beard . . . the one I wore to the Count of Monte Cristo's masquerade ball last week . . . thought it'd come in handy." Alex tossed articles of apparel every which way, and Tanni sighed. "You see, I've already been to the Admiralty in my proper *persona*, and they wouldn't order out the fleet to catch those pirates — said the routine patrols were adequate. Going over their heads, through Parliament and the King, would take too long. . . . Ah, here!" He emerged with a hideous green beard, fully half a meter in length.

"I'll go direct to Lord Nelson, who's in town," he went on. "It's best to do it incognito, to avoid offending the Admiralty; this beard is disguise enough, not being included in the Hokas' Jones-Gestalt. Once alone with him, I'll reveal myself and explain the situation. He's pretty level-headed, I'm told, and will act on his own responsibility." He put the beard to his chin, and the warmth of his body stuck it as fast as a natural growth — more so, for the synthetic fibers could not be cut or burned

Tanni shuddered at the loathsome sight. "How do you get it off?" she asked weakly.

"Spirits of ammonia. All right, I'm on my way again." Alex stooped to kiss her and wondered why she shrank away. "Wait around till I get back. It may take a while."

The foliage flapped around his chest as he went downstairs. "Scuttle my hatches!" said someone. "What is it?"

"Seaweed," theorized another. "He's been too long underwater."

Alex reached the dock and stared over the tangle of rigging and tall masts which lay beyond. The Hokas had built quite a sizable navy in expectation of imminent Napoleonic invasion, and HMS *Intolerable* lay almost side by side with *Incorrigible* and *Pinafore*. Their mermaid figureheads gleamed gilt in the light of a lowering sun — that is, Alex assumed the fish-tailed Hoka females to be mermaids, though the four mammaries were so prominent as to suggest ramming was still standard naval practice. He couldn't see where the *Victory* was. Casting about for assistance, he spotted a patrol of sailors swinging along with a burly little Hoka in the lead. "Ahoy!" he yelled.

The patrol stepped smartly up to him, neat in their British Navy uniforms. "Tell me," said Alex,

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"how do I get out to the flagship? I must see Admiral Lord Nelson at once."

"Stow my top-hamper!" squeaked the leader. "You can't see the Admiral, mate. 'Tain't proper for a common seaman to speak to the Admiral unless spoken to first."

"No doubt," said Alex. "But I'm not a common seaman."

"Aye, that you are, mate," replied the other cheerfully. "Pressed right and proper as a common seaman, or me name's not Billy Bosun."

"No, no, you don't understand—" Alex was beginning, when the meaning filtered through to him. "*Pressed?*

"Taken by the press gang of Billy Bosun for His Majesty's fr[illegible] *Incompatible*," said the Hoka. "And a fair bit o' luck for you, mate. The worst hell-ship afloat, not counting the *Bounty*, and we sail on patrol in two hours. Toss the prisoner into the gig, men."

"No! Wait!" yelled Alex, frantically trying to pull his beard loose. "Let me explain. You don't know who I am. You can't —"

As he himself had remarked, the Hoka musculature is amazingly strong. He landed on his head in the bottom of the gig and went out like a light.

"Pressed man to speak with you, Cap'n Yardly," said Billy Bosun, ushering Alex into the captain's cabin.

The human blinked in the light from the cabin portholes and tried to brace himself against the rolling of the ship. He had been locked in the forward hold all night, during which time HMS *Incompatible* had left England far behind. He had gotten over a headache and a tendency to seasickness, but was frantic with the thought that every minute was taking him farther from Tanni and his desperately urgent mission. He stared at the blue-coated, cocked-hatted Hoka who sat behind a desk facing him, and opened his mouth to speak, but the other beat him to it.

"Does, does he?" growled Captain Yardly. The fur bristled on his neck. "Thinks he signed on for a pleasure cruise, no doubt! We'll teach him different, b'gad, won't we, bosun?"

"Aye, sir," said Billy stiffly.

"Wait, Captain Yardly!" cried Alex. "Let me just have a private word with you —"

"Private, eh? Private, damme!" exploded the Hoka. "There's no privacy aboard a King's ship. Ain't that right, bosun?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"But if you'll just listen to me for a moment —" wailed Alex.

"Listen, b'gad! I don't listen to men, do I, bosun?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Nothing in the articles of war that makes it my duty to listen! My duty's to flog, b'gad; keelhaul, damme; drive the mutinous dogs till they drop! Stap my vitals, eh, bosun?" Captain Yardly snorted with indignation.

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"Aye, aye, sir."

Alex took a firm grip on his temper. He reminded himself that there was no use arguing with a Hoka once he had decided to play a certain role. The only way to handle him was to act along. Alex forced his face into a meek expression.

"Sorry, Captain," he said. "The truth is, I've come to confess that I'm not what I appear to be."

"Well, that's different!" huffed the officer. "Nothing against my listening to a man's confession as long as I flog him afterward anyway."

Alex gulped, and quickly continued: "The truth is, Captain, this green beard of mine is false. You probably think I'm one of these outworlders you see occasionally, but without it, you'd recognize me at once. I'll bet you can't guess who I really am."

"Done!" roared the skipper.

"Huh?" said Alex.

"I wager I can guess who you are. Your name's Greenbeard."

"No — no —"

"Said so yourself."

"No, I said —"

"SILENCE!" thundered the captain. "You've lost your wager. No carping, damme. It's not done. Not sporting at all. I'm appointing you first mate, Mr Greenbeard, in accordance with regulations —"

"Regulations?" stammered Alex. "What regulations?"

"Pressed man always appointed first mate," snorted Captain Yardly, "in spite of his well-known sympathy for the crew. Got sympathy for the crew, haven't you?"

"Well . . . I suppose so . . ." mumbled Alex. "I mean . . . what kind of first mate would I be — No, wait, I'm all mixed up. I mean —"

"No back talk, if you please!" interrupted the Hoka. "Step lively and drive her smartly, Mr. Greenbeard. We're headed around the Horn, and I want no malingerers aboard."

"The Horn?" goggled Alex.

"You heard me, Mr. Greenbeard."

"But —" protested Alex wildly, as Billy Bosun started pulling him by main force out of the cabin. "How . . . how long a voyage is this supposed to be?"

The captain's face dropped suddenly into an unhappy, embarrassed expression.

"That depends," he said morosely, "on which way we go."

And he turned and vanished through a connecting door into the inner cabin. His voice came back, somewhat muffled: "Clap on all sail, Mr. Greenbeard, and call me if the weather freshens."

The words were followed by what sounded like a sob of desperation.

Giving up further argument as a bad job, Alex went back on deck. A stiff breeze drove the *Incompatible* merrily over a sea which sparkled blue, to the sound of creaking boards and whining rig. The crew moved industriously about their tasks, and

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Alex hoped he wouldn't be needed to direct them. He could pilot a spaceship between the stars, but the jungle of lines overhead baffled him.

Probably he wasn't essential, though. He was simply part of the pattern which the Hokas followed so loyally; in the same way, all that talk about gruesome punishment must be just talk — the Navy felt it was expected of them. Which was, however, small consolation, since the same blind devotion would keep the ship out here for as long as the orders said. Without this eternally cursed beard, Alex could easily take command and get back to shore: but he couldn't get rid of the beard till he *was* ashore. He had a sense of futility.

As he walked along the deck, his eyes lit on a completely incongruous figure leaning on one of the guns. This was a Viking in shirt and trousers of coarse cloth, leather leggings, a chain-mail coat, a shaggy cape, a conical helmet with huge upcurving horns, and an interminable sword. A pair of very large and obviously fake yellow mustaches drooped from his snout. He looked mournful.

Alex drew up to the anachronism, realizing he must be from the viking-culture area in the north and wondering how he had gotten here. "Hello," he said. "My name's Jo —" He stopped; it was useless to assert his identity till he got that triply damned spinach off his face. — "Greenbeard."

"Pleased to meet yü," said the viking in a high-pitched singsong. "Ay ban Olaf Button-nose from Sveden. Have yü ever ban to Constantinople?"

"Well — no," said Alex, taken somewhat aback.

"Ay vas afraid yü hadn't," said Olaf, with two great tears running down into his mustache. "Nobody has. Ay come sout' and signed on here, hoping ve vould touch at Constantinople, and ve never do."

"Why?" asked Alex, fascinated.

"To yoin the Varangian Guard, of course," said Olaf. "Riches, loot, beautiful vimmen, lusty battles, ha, Odin." He shed two more tears.

"But —" Alex felt a twinge of compassion. "I'm afraid, Olaf, that there isn't any Constantinople on this planet."

"How do yü know, if yü never been there?"

"Why, because —" Alex found the conversation showing the usual Hoka tendency to get out of hand. He gritted his teeth. "Now, look, Olaf, if I *had* been there, I'd be able to tell you where it was, wouldn't I?"

"Ay hope yü vould," said Olaf pessimistically.

"But since I *haven't* been there, I can't tell you where it is, can I?"

"Exactly," said Olaf. "Yü don't know. That's yust what Ay vas telling yü."

"No, no, *no!*" yelled Alex. "You don't get the point —"

At this moment, the door to the captain's cabin banged open and

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Yardly himself came popping out on deck.

"Avast and lay forrad!" he bellowed. "All hands to the yards! Aloft and stand by to come about! We're standing in to round the Horn!"

There was a stampeding rush, a roar, and Alex found himself alone. Everybody else had gone into the rigging, including the helmsman and captain. Alex turned hesitantly to one of the masts, changed his mind, and ran to the bows. But there was no land in sight.

He scratched his head and returned amidships. Presently everyone came down again, the crew growling among themselves. Captain Yardly slunk by Alex, avoiding his eyes and muttering something about "slight error — happen to anyone —" and disappeared back into his cabin.

Olaf returned, accompanied by Billy Bosun. "Wrong again," said the viking gloomily.

"Rot me for a corposant's ghost if the crew'll take much more o' this," added Billy.

"Take more of what?" inquired Alex.

"The captain trying to round the Horn, sir," said Billy. "Terrible hard it is, sir."

"Are they afraid of the weather?" asked Alex.

"Weather, sir?" replied Billy. "Why, the weather's supposed to be uncommon good around the Horn."

Alex goggled at him. "Then what's so hard about rounding it?"

"Why, nothing's hard about *rounding* it," said Billy. "It's *finding* it that's so hard, sir. Few ships can boast they've rounded the Horn without losing at least part of their crew from old age first."

"But doesn't everybody know where it is?"

"Why, bless you, sir, of course everybody knows. It doesn't move around. But we do. And where are we?"

"Where are *we?*" echoed Alex, thunderstruck.

"Aye, sir, that's the question. In the old days, if we were here we'd be about one day's sail out of Plymouth on the southwest current."

"But that's where we are."

"Oh, no, sir," said Billy. "We're in the Antarctic Ocean. That's why the captain thought he was close to the Horn. That is, unless he's moved us since."

Alex gave a wordless cry, turned, and fled to the captain's cabin. Inside it, the skipper sat at a desk mounded high with sheets of calculations. There was a tortured look on his furry face. On the bulkhead behind him was an enormous map of Toka crisscrossed with jagged pencil lines.

"Ah, Mr. Greenbeard," he said in a quavering voice as he looked up. "Congratulate me. I've just moved us three thousand miles. A little matter of figuring declination

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in degrees east instead of degrees west." He glanced anxiously at Alex. "That sounds right, doesn't it?"

"Ulp!" said Alex.

In the following four days, the human gradually came to understand. In earlier times, native ships had found their way around the planet's oceans by a familiarity with the currents and prevailing winds, but with the technology of 1800 had come the science of navigation, and since then no Hoka would lower himself to use the old-fashioned methods. With the new, some were successful, others were not. Lord Nelson, it was said, was an excellent navigator. So was Commodore Hornblower. Others had their difficulties. Captain Yardly's was that while he never failed to take a proper sight with his sextant, he invariably mistrusted the reading he got and was inclined to shift his figures around until they looked more like what he thought they should be. Also, he had a passion for even numbers, and was always rounding off his quantities to more agreeable amounts.

Under this handicap, the physical ship sailed serenely to her destination, guided by a non-navigating crew who automatically did the proper thing in the old fashion at the proper time. But the hypothetical ship of Captain Yardly's mathematical labors traversed a wild and wonderful path on the map, at one time so far at sea that there was not enough fresh water for them to make land alive; at another time perched high and dry on the western plains of Toka's largest continent. It was not strange that the skipper had a haunted look.

All of which was very unsettling to the crew, who, however willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, were finding it somewhat of a strain even on their elastic imaginations to be told they were in the tropics at one moment and skirting the south polar ice the next. Their nerves were on edge. Moreover, Alex discovered, the consensus among them was that the captain was becoming too obsessed with his navigation to pay proper attention to the running of the ship. No one had been hanged for several weeks, and there hadn't been a keelhauling for over a month. Many a Hoka standing on the sun-blistered deck cast longing glances at the cool water overside and wished he would be keelhauled (which was merely fun on a planet without barnacles). There was much fo'c'sle talk about what act could be committed dastardly enough to rate the punishment.

"If you want a swim, why don't you just fall overboard?" asked Alex of Billy Bosun on the fourth day.

The Hoka's beady eyes lit up, and then saddened again. "No, sir," he said wistfully. "It's contrary to the articles of war, sir.

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Everybody knows British sailors can't swim a stroke."

"Oh, well," said Alex helpfully. "If you've got scruples —" He picked up the boatswain and tossed him over the rail. Billy splashed into the sea with a howl of delight.

"Shiver my timbers!" he roared gleefully, threshing around alongside and blowing spouts of water into the air. "I'm murdered! Help! Help! Man overboard!"

The crew came boiling up on deck. Small furry bodies began to go sailing into the sea, yelling something about rescue. The second mate started to lower a boat, decided to pitch the nearest sailor into the ocean instead, and followed him.

"Heave to!" screamed Alex, panic-stricken. "Man — er — men overboard! Bring her about!"

The helmsman spun the wheel and the ship pivoted into the wind's eye with a rattle of canvas. Whooping, he bounced up on the taffrail, overbalanced, and fell. His joyously lamenting voice joined the chorus already resounding below.

The door to the captain's cabin flew open. Yardly rushed out. "Avast!" he cried. "Belay! What's about here?" He headed for the rail and stared downward.

"We're drowning!" the crew informed him, playing tag.

"Belay that!" shouted the captain. "Avast drowning, immediately. Call yourself British seamen, do you? Mutinous dogs, I call you. Treacherous, mutinous dogs! Quarrelsome, treacherous, mutinous dogs! Careless, quarrel —"

He looked so hot and unhappy in his blue coat and cocked hat that Alex impulsively picked him up and threw him over the side.

He hit the water and came up spouting and shaking his fist. "Mister Greenbeard!" he thundered. "You'll hang for this. *This is mutiny!*"

"But we don't have to hang him, do we?" protested Alex.

"Blast my bones, Cap'n Greenbeard," said Billy, "but Yardly was going to hang *you*."

"Ay don't see how yü can avoid it," said Olaf, emptying sea water out of his scabbard. "Ve ban pirates now."

"Pirates!" yelped Alex.

"What else is left for us, Cap'n?" asked Billy. "We've mutinied, ain't we? The British Navy'll never rest till we're hunted down."

"Oh well," said Alex wearily. If hanging the ex-captain was considered part of the pattern, he might as well play along. He turned to the two seamen holding Yardly. "String him up."

They put a noose around the captain's neck and politely stepped back. He took a pace forward and surveyed the crew, then scowled blackly and folded his arms.

"Treacherous, ungrateful swine!" he said. "Don't suppose that you will escape punishment for this foul

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crime. As there is a divine as well as a Hoka justice —"

Alex found a bollard and seated himself on it with a sigh. Yardly gave every indication of being good for an hour of dying speech. The human relaxed and let the words flow in one ear and out the other. A sailor scribbled busily, taking it all down for later publication in a broadside.

"— this causeless mutiny — plotted in secret — ringleaders did not escape my eye — some loyal hearts and true poisoned by men of evil — forgive you personally, but — sully the British Flag — cannot meet my eye — in the words of that great man —"

"Oh, no!" said Alex involuntarily, but Billy was already giving the captain the pitch on his boatswain's whistle.

"*Oh, my name it is Sam Hall, it is Sam Hall.*

Yes, my name it is Sam Hall, it is Sam Hall. . . ."

Like most Hokas, the captain had a rather pleasant tenor, reflected Alex, but *why* did they all have to sing "Sam Hall" before being hanged?

"*Now up the rope I go, up I go. . . .*"

Alex winced. The song came to an end. Yardly wandered off on a sentimental side issue, informed the crew that he had had a good home and loving parents, who little suspected he would come to this, spoke a few touching words concerning his golden-furred little daughter ashore, wound up by damning them all for a pack of black-hearted scoundrels, and in a firm voice ordered the men on the end of the rope to do their duty.

The Hokas struck up a lively chanty, and to the tune of "Haul Away, Joe" Yardly mounted into the air. The crew paled and fainted enthusiastically as for five minutes he put on a spirited performance of realistic twitches, groans, and death rattles — effective enough to make Alex turn slightly green behind his beard. He was never sure whether or not something at this stage had gone wrong and the Hoka on the rope was actually being strangled. Finally, however, Yardly hung limp. Billy Bosun cut him down and brought him to the captain's cabin, where Alex signed him up under the name of Black Tom Yardly and sent him forward of the mast.

Thus left in charge of a ship which he had only the foggiest notion of how to run, and a crew gleefully looking forward to a piratical existence, Alex put his head in his hands and tried to sort matters out.

He was regretting the mutiny already. Whatever had possessed him to throw the captain of a British frigate overboard? He might have known such a proceeding would lead to trouble. There was no doubt Yardly had been praying for an excuse to get out of his navigational duties. But what could Alex have done once his misguided

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impulse had sent Yardly into the ocean? If he had meekly surrendered, Yardly would probably have hanged him . . . and Alex did not have a Hoka's neck muscles. He gulped at the thought. He could imagine the puzzlement of the crew once they had cut him down and he didn't get up and walk away. But what good is a puzzled Hoka to a dead plenipotentiary? None whatsoever.

Moreover, not only was he in this pickle, but five days had gone by. Tanni would be frantically flying around the world looking for him, but the chance of her passing over this speck in the ocean was infinitesimal. It would take at least another five days to get back to Plymouth, and hell might explode in Bermuda meanwhile. Or he might be seized in the harbor if someone blabbed and strung up as a mutineer before he could get this green horror off his chin.

On the other hand —

Slowly, Alex got up and went over to the map on the bulkhead. The Hokas had been quick to adopt terrestrial place names, but there had, of course, been nothing they could do about the geographical dissimilarity of Toka and Earth. The West Indies here were only some 500 nautical miles from England; HMS *Incompatible* was almost upon them now, and the pirate headquarters at Tortuga could hardly be more than a day's sail away. It shouldn't be too hard to find, and the buccaneer fleet would welcome a new recruit. Maybe he could find some ammonia there. Otherwise he could try to forestall the raid, or sabotage it, or something.

He stood for several minutes considering this. It was dangerous, to be sure. Cannon, pistols, and cutlasses, mixed with Hoka physical energy and mental impulsiveness, were nothing a man wanted close to him. But every other possibility looked even more hopeless.

He went to the door and called Olaf. "Tell me," he said, "do you think you can steer this ship in the old-fashioned way?"

"To be sure Ay can," said the viking. "Ay'm old-fashion myself."

"True," agreed Alex. "Well, then, I'm going to appoint you first mate."

"Ay don't know about that, now," interrupted Olaf doubtfully. "Ay don't know if it ban right."

"Of course," said Alex hastily, "you won't be a regular first mate. You'll be a Varangian first mate."

"Of course Ay vill!" exclaimed Olaf, brightening. "Ay hadn't t'ought of that. Ay'll steer for Constantinople."

"Well — er — remember we don't know where Constantinople is," said Alex. "I think we'd better put in at Tortuga first for information."

Olaf's face fell. "Oh," he said sadly.

"Later on we can look for Constantinople."

"Ay suppose so."

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Seldom had Alex felt so much like a heel.

They came slipping into the bay of Tortuga about sunset of the following day, flying the skull-and-crossbones which was kept in the flag chest of every ship just in case. The island, fronded with tropical trees, rose steeply over an anchorage cluttered with a score of armed vessels; beyond, the beach was littered with thatch huts, roaring bonfires, and swaggering pirates. As their anchor rattled down, someone whooped from the crow's nest of the nearest vessel: "Ahoy, mates! Ye're just in time. We sail for Bermuda tomorry."

Alex shivered, the green beard and the thickening dusk concealing his unbuccaneerish activity. To the eagerly swarming crew, he said: "You'll stay aboard till further orders."

"What?" cried Black Tom Yardly, outraged. "We're not to broach a cask with our brethren of the coast? We're not to fight bloody duels, if you'll pardon the language, and wallow in pieces of eight and —"

"Later," said Alex. "Secret mission, you know. You can break out our own grog, bosun." That satisfied them, and they lowered the captain's gig for him and Olaf to go ashore in. As he was rowed away from the *Incompatible*, Alex heard someone start a song about a life on the ocean wave, in competition with someone else who, for lack of further knowledge, was endlessly repeating, "Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum." *They're happy*, he thought.

"What yü ban going to do now?" inquired Olaf.

"I wish I knew," said Alex forlornly. The little viking, with his skepticism about the whole pirate pattern, was the only one he could trust at all, and even to Olaf he dared not confide his real hopes. Such as they were.

Landing, they walked through a roaring, drunken crowd of Hokas trying to look as villainous as possible with the help of pistols, knives, cutlasses, daggers, sashes, earrings, and nose-rings. The Jolly Roger flew over a long hut within which the Captains of the Coast must be meeting; outside squatted a sentry who was trying to drink rum but not succeeding very well because he would not let go of the dagger in his teeth.

"Avast and belay there!" shrilled this freebooter, lurching erect and drawing his cutlass as Alex's bejungled face came out of the gloom. "Halt and be run through!"

Alex hesitated. His sea-stained tunic and trousers didn't look very piratical, he was forced to admit, and the cutlass and floppy boots he had added simply kept tripping him up. "I'm a captain too," he said. "I want to confer with my . . . er . . . confreres."

The sentry staggered toward him, waving a menacing blade. Alex,

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who had not the faintest idea of how to use a sword, backed up. "So!" sneered the Hoka. "So ye'll not stand up like a man, eh? I was tol' t' run anybody through what came near, and damme, I will!"

"Oh, shut up," said Olaf wearily. His own sword snaked out, knocking the pirate's loose. That worthy tried to close in with his dagger, but Olaf pushed him over and sat on him. "Ay'll hold him here, skipper," said the viking. Hopefully, to his squirming victim: "Do yü know the vay to Constantinople?"

Alex opened the door and walked in, not without trepidation. The hut was lit by guttering candles stuck in empty bottles, to show a rowdy group of captains seated around a long table. One of them, with a patch over his eye, glared up. "Who goes?" he challenged.

"Captain Greenbeard of the *Incompatible*," said Alex firmly. "I just got in."

"Oh, well, siddown, mate," said the pirate. "I'm Cap'n One-Eye, and these here is Henry Morgan, and Flint, and Long John Silver, and Hook, and Anne Bonney, and our admiral La Fontaine, and —" Someone clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Who's this?" squeaked La Fontaine from under his cocked hat. Twenty pairs of Hoka eyes swiveled from him to Alex and back again.

"Why, scupper and gut me!" growled another, who had a hook taped to the end of his hand. "Don't ye know Cap'n Greenbeard?"

"Of course not!" said La Fontaine. "How could I know a Cap'n Greenbeard when there ain't any such man? Not in any of the books there ain't. I'll wager he's John Paul Jones in disguise."

"I resent that!" boomed a short Hoka, bouncing to his feet. "Cap'n Greenbeard's my cousin!" And he stroked the black, glossy, but obviously artificial beard on his chin.

"Blast me, nobody can say that about a friend of Anne Bonney," added the female pirate. She was brilliantly bedecked in jewels, horse pistols, and a long gown which she had valiantly tried to give a low-cut bodice. A quadrimammarian Hoka needed two bodices, one above the other, and she had them.

"Oh, very well," grumbled La Fontaine. "Have a drink, cap'n, and help us plan this raid."

Alex accepted a tumbler of the fiery native distillation. Hokas have a fantastic capacity, but he hoped to go slow and, in view of the long head start the others had, stay halfway sober. Maybe he could master the situation somehow. "Thanks," he said. "Have one yourself."

"Don't mind if I do, mate," said La Fontaine amiably, tossing off another half liter. "Hic!"

"Is there any spirits of ammonia here?" asked Alex.

One-Eye shifted his patch around to the other orb and looked sur-

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prised. "Not that I know of, mate," he said. "Should be some in Bermuda. Ye want it for polishing up treasure before burying it?"

"Let's come to order!" piped Long John Silver, pounding his crutch on the table. His left leg was strapped up against the thigh. "By the Great Horn Spoon, we have to make some plans if we're going to sail tomorrow."

"I, er, don't think we should start that soon," said Alex.

"So!" cried La Fontaine triumphantly. "A coward, is it? Rip my mainto'gallantstuns'l if I think ye're fit to be a Captain o' the Coast. Hic!"

Alex thought fast. "Shiver my timbers!" he roared back. "A coward, am I? I'll have your liver for breakfast for that, La Fontaine! What d'ye take for me, a puling clerk? Stow me for a — a — sea-chest if I think a white-faced stick like yourself is fit to be admiral over the likes of us. Why," he added cunningly, "you haven't even got a beard."

"Whuzzat got to do with it?" asked La Fontaine muzzily, falling into the trap.

"What kind of admiral is it that hasn't got hair on his chin?" demanded Alex, and saw the point strike home to the Hokas about him.

"Admirals don't have to have beards," protested La Fontaine.

"Why, hang, draw, and quarter me!" interrupted Captain Flint. "Of course admirals have to have beards. I thought everybody knew that." A murmur of assent went up around the table.

"You're right," said Anne Bonney. "Everybody knows that. There's only two here fit to command the fleet: Cap'n Blackbeard and Cap'n Greenbeard."

"Captain Blackbeard will do very well," said Alex graciously.

The little Hoka got to his feet. "Bilge me," he quavered, "if I ever been so touched in m' life before. Bung me through the middle with a boarding pike if it ain't right noble of you, Cap'n Greenbeard. But amongst us all, I can't take an unfair advantage. Much as I'd be proud to admiral the fleet, your beard is a good three inches longer'n mine. I therefore resigns in your favor."

"But —" stammered Alex, who had expected anything but this.

"That's fantastic!" objected La Fontaine tearfully. "You can't pick a man by his beard — I mean — it isn't — you just can't!"

"La Fontaine!" roared Hook, pounding the table. "This here council o' pirate captains is following the time-honored procedure of the Brethren o' the Coast. If you wanted to be elected admiral, you should ha' put on a beard afore you come to meeting. I hereby declares the election over."

At this last and cruelest cut, La Fontaine fell speechless. "Drawer!" shouted Henry Morgan. "Flagons

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all around to drink to the success of our venture."

Alex accepted his warily. He was getting the germ of an idea. There was no chance of postponing the raid as he had hoped; he knew his Hokas too well. But perhaps he could blunt the attack by removing its leadership, both himself and La Fontaine. . . . He reached over and clapped the ex-chief on the shoulder. "No hard feelings, mate," he said. "Come, drink a bumper with me, and you can be admiral next time."

La Fontaine nodded, happy again, and threw another half liter down his gullet. "I like a man who drinks like that!" shouted Alex. "Drawer, fill his flagon again! Come on, mate, drink up. There's more where that came from."

"Split my mizzenmast," put in Hook, "but that's a neat way o' turning it, Admiral! 'More where that came from.' Neat as a furled sail. True, too."

"Oh, well," said Alex bashfully.

"Here, drawer, fill up for Admiral Greenbeard," cried Hook "That's right. Drink deep, me hearty. More where that came from. Haw!"

"Ulp!" said Alex. Somehow, he got it down past shriveling tonsils. "Hoo-oo-oo!"

"Sore throat?" asked Anne Bonney solicitously.

"More where that came from," bellowed Hook. "Fill up."

Alex handed his goblet to La Fontaine. "Take it, mate," he said generously. "Drink my health."

"Whoops!" said the ex-admiral, tossed it off, and passed out.

"Yo, heave ho," said Billy Bosun. "Up you come, mate."

They hoisted the limp figure of La Fontaine over the rail of the *Incompatible*. Alex, leaning heavily on Olaf, directed operations.

"Lock 'im in m' cabin," he wheezed. "Hois' anchor an' set sail for Bermuda." He stared toward the sinking moon. Toka seemed suddenly to have acquired an extra satellite. "Secret mission, y' know. Fi-ifteen men on a dea-ead man's chest —"

"Sling a hammock on deck for the captain," ordered Billy. "He don't seem to be feeling so well."

"Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum," warbled Alex.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Billy, and handed him one.

"Woof!" groaned Alex and collapsed. The night sky began majestically revolving around him. Shadowy sails reached out to catch the offshore breeze. The *Incompatible* moved slowly from the harbor. Alex did not see this. . . .

Bright sunlight awakened him. He lay in his hammock till the worst was over, and then tried to sort things out. The ship was heeling to a steady wind and the sounds of sail-flap, rig-thrum, plank-creak, and crew-talk buzzed around him. Rising, he saw that they were alone in the great circle of the horizon. In the waist, the starboard watch

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were sitting about telling each other blood-curdling tales of their piratical exploits. Black Tom Yardly, as usual, was outdoing all the rest.

Alex accepted breakfast from the cook, lit the captain's pipe in lieu of a cigaret, and considered his situation. It could be worse. He'd gotten away with La Fontaine, and they should be in Bermuda shortly after sunset. There would be time to warn it and organize its defenses; and the pirates, lacking both their accustomed and their new admiral, would perhaps botch the attack completely. He beamed and called to his first mate. "Mr. Buttonnose!"

Olaf approached. "Ay give yü good morning," he said gravely.

"Oh? Well, the same to you, Olaf," replied Alex. There was a certain air of old world courtesy about the small viking which seemed infectious. "What kind of speed are we making?"

"About ten dragons' teeth," said Olaf.

"Dragons' teeth?" repeated Alex, bewildered.

"Knots, yü vould say. Ay don't like to call them knots, myself. It don't sound Varangian."

"Fine, fine," smiled Alex. "We should be there in no time."

"Vell, yes," said Olaf, "only Ay suppose ve must heave to now."

"Heave to?" cried Alex. "What for?"

"So yü can have a conference vit' the other captains," said Olaf, pointing astern. Alex spun on his heel and stared along the creamy wake of the *Indomitable*. There were sails lifting over the horizon — the pirate fleet!

"My God!" he exclaimed, turning white. "Pile on all sail!" Olaf looked at him, surprised. "Pile on all sail!"

Olaf shook his round head. "Vell, Ay suppose yü know best," he said tiredly, and went off to give the necessary orders.

The *Incompatible* leaped forward, but the other ships still crept up on her. Alex swallowed. Olaf returned from heaving the log.

"Tvelve dragons' teeth," he informed Alex reproachfully.

It was not a pleasant day for Admiral Greenbeard. In spite of almost losing the masts, he could not distance the freebooters, and the gap continued to narrow. Toward sunset, the other ships had almost surrounded him. The islands of Bermuda were becoming visible, and as darkness began to fall the whole fleet rounded the headland north of Bermuda City Bay. Lights twinkled on the shore, and the Hokas crowding the shrouds set up a lusty cheer. Resignedly, Alex ordered his crew to heave to. The other craft did likewise, and they all lay still.

Alex waited, chewing his fingernails. When an hour had passed and nothing happened except sailors hailing each other, he hunted up Olaf. "What do you think they're waiting for?" he asked nervously.

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The bear-like face leaned forward out of shadow. "Ay don't t'ink," said Olaf. "Ay know. They're vaiting for yü to signal the captains aboard your flagship. The qvestion is, what are yü vaiting for?"

"Me? Summon them?" asked Alex blankly. "But they were chasing us!"

"Ay vould not call it shasing," said Olaf. "Since yü ban admiral, they vould not vant to pass yü up."

"No, no, Olaf." Alex lowered his voice to a whisper. "Listen, I was trying to escape from them."

"Yü vere? Then yü should have said so," declared Olaf strongly. "I ban having a terrible time — yust terrible — to keep from running avay from them vit' all sails set."

"But why did you think they were following us?" raved Alex.

"Vy, what should they be doing?" demanded Olaf. "Yü ban admiral. Naturally, ven ve leave for Bermuda, they're going to follow yü."

Speechless, Alex collapsed on a bollard. After a while he stirred feebly.

"Signal all captains to report aboard for conference," he said in a weak voice.

"Gut and smoke me!" thundered Captain Hook, as the chiefs crowded around a table arranged on the poop. "Slice me up for hors d'oeuvres, but you're a broom-at-the-mast sailor, Admiral Greenbeard. We had to clap on all canvas to keep you in sight."

"Oh, well," said Alex modestly.

"Blast my powder magazine if I ever seen anything like it. There you was, flying through the water like a bloody gull; and at the same time I could have laid me oath you was holding the ship back as hard as you could."

"Little sailing trick . . ." murmured Alex.

"Blind me!" marveled Hook. "Well, to business. Who's to lead the attack on the fort, Admiral?"

"Fort?" echoed Alex blankly.

"You knows how it is," said Hook. "They got cannon mounted on that Fort which juts out into the bay. We'll have to sail past and give 'em a broadside to put 'em out of action. Then we can land and sack the town before Lord Nelson, blast his frogs and facings, shows up."

"Oh," said Alex. He was thinking with the swiftness of a badly frightened man. Once actual fighting started, Hokas would be getting killed — which, quite apart from any sympathy, meant the end of his tenure as plenipotentiary. If he himself wasn't knocked off in the battle. "Well . . ." he began slowly. "I have another plan."

"Hull and sink me!" said Long John Silver. "A plan?"

"Yes, a plan. We can't get by that fort without getting hurt. But one small boat can slip in easily enough, unobserved."

"Stab me!" murmured Captain Kidd in awe. "Why, that's sheer genius."

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"My mate and I will go ashore," went on Alex. "I have a scheme to capture the mayor and make him order the fort evacuated." Actually, his thoughts extended no further than warning the town and getting this noxious vegetation off his face. "Wait till I signal you from the jetty with lanterns how you're to arrive. One if by land and two if by sea."

"Won't go, Admiral," said Anne Bonney. She waved into the darkness, from which came the impatient grumbling of the crews. "The men won't brook delay. We can't hold 'em here more than a couple of hours, then we'll have to attack or face a mutiny."

Alex sighed. His last hope of avoiding a fight altogether, by making the fleet wait indefinitely, seemed to have gone glimmering. "All right," he agreed hollowly. "Sail in and land the men. Don't fire on the fort, though, unless it shoots first, because I may be able to empty it in the way I suggested."

"Scupper and split me, but you're a brave man," said Hook. "Chop me up for shark bait if I think we could ha' done anything without you."

"Thanks," gritted Alex. It was the most unkindest cut of all.

The other Hokas nodded and rumbled agreement. Hero worship shone in their round black eyes.

"I moves we drinks to the Admiral's health!" boomed Flint. "Steward! Fetch flagons for —"

"I'd better leave right away," said Alex hurriedly.

"Nonsense," said Henry Morgan. "Who ever heard of a pirate doing anything sober?"

"Psssh!" said Alex, rapping on the window of the mayor's residence. Muffled noises came from the garden behind, where Olaf had tied up the guards who would never have permitted a green-bearded stranger to approach.

The window opened and the mayor, an exceedingly fat Hoka pompous in ruffles and ribbons, looked out, square into the nauseous tangle of hair beyond.

"Eek!" he said.

"Hic," replied Alex, holding on to the sill while the house waltzed around him.

"Help!" cried the mayor. "Sea monsters attacking! Drum up the guard! Man the battlements! Stow the belaying pins!"

A familiar golden head appeared over his shoulder. "Alex!" gasped Tanni. "Where have you been?"

"Pressed pirate," said Alex, reeling. "Admiral Greenbeard. Help me in. Hic!"

"Drunk again," said Tanni resignedly, grabbing his collar as he scrambled over the sill. She loved her husband; she had been scouring the planet in search of him, had come here as a forlorn hope; but the enfoliated spectacle before her was not calculated to bring joyful tears.

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"Mayor Bermuda," mumbled Alex. "British gen'leman. En'ertain th' lady. Ge' me anti-alco — anti — alco — alkyho — yo-ho-ho an' a bo'le o' rum —"

Tanni left him struggling with the word and went off after a soberpill. Alex got it down and shuddered back to normal.

"Whoof!" he exclaimed. "That's better. . . . Tanni, we're in one hell of a spot. Pirates —"

"The pirates," she said firmly, "can wait till you get that thing off your face." She extended a bottle of ammonia and a wad of cotton.

Thankfully, Alex removed the horror and gave them the story. He finished with: "They're too worked up to listen to me now, even in my character of plenipotentiary. They'll be landing any minute. But if we don't offer resistance, there'll at least be no bloodshed. Let them have the loot if they must."

"Come, come," said the mayor. "It's out of the question. Out of the question entirely."

"But they outnumber your garrison!" sputtered Alex.

"Beastly fellows," agreed the mayor happily, lighting a cigar.

"You can't possibly fight them off. The only thing to do is surrender."

"Surrender? But we're *British!*" explained the mayor patiently.

"Damn it, I order you to surrender!"

"Impossible," said the mayor dogmatically. "Absolutely impossible. Contrary to Colonial Office regulations."

"But you're bound to lose!"

"Gallantly," pointed out the mayor.

"This is stupid!"

"Naturally," said the mayor mildly. "We're muddling through. Muddle rather well, if I do say so myself."

Alex groaned. Tanni clenched her fists. The mayor turned to the door. "I'd better have the soldiers informed," he said.

"No . . . wait!" Alex leaped to his feet. Something had come back to him. *Chop me up for shark bait if I think we could ha' done anything without you.* And the others had agreed . . . and once a Hoka got an idea in his head, you couldn't blast it loose. . . . His hope was wild and frail, but there was nothing to lose. "I've got a plan."

"A plan?" The mayor looked dubious.

Alex saw his error. "No, no," he said hastily. "I mean a ruse."

"Oh, a *ruse!*" The mayor's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Excellent. Superb. Just the sort of thing for this situation. What is it, my dear plenipotentiary?"

"Let them land unopposed," said Alex. "They'll head for your palace first, of course."

"Unopposed?" asked the mayor. "But I just explained —"

Alex pulled out his cutlass and flourished it. "When they get here, *I'll* oppose them."

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"One man against twenty ships?"

Alex drew himself up haughtily. "Do you imply that I, your plenipotentiary, can't stop twenty ships?"

"Oh, no," said the mayor. "Not at all. By all means, my dear sir. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must have the town crier inform the people. They'd never forgive me if they missed such a spectacle." He bustled away.

"Darling!" Tanni grabbed his arm. "You're crazy. We don't have so much as a raythrower — they'll kill you!"

"I hope not," said Alex bleakly. He stuck his head out the window. "Come in, Olaf. I'll need your help."

The corsair fleet moved in under the silent guns of the fort and dropped anchor at the quay. Whooping, shouting, and brandishing their weapons, the crews stormed ashore and rushed up the main street toward the mayor's palace. They were mildly taken aback to see the way lined with townsfolk excitedly watching and making bets on the outcome, but hastened on roaring bloodthirsty threats.

The palace lay inside a walled garden whose gate stood open. Nearby, the redcoats of the garrison were lined up at attention. Olaf watched them gloweringly: it was his assignment to keep any of them from shooting. Overhead, great lanterns threw a restless yellow light on the scene.

"Fillet and smoke me, but there's our admiral!" shouted Captain Hook as the tall green-bearded figure with drawn cutlass stepped through the gateway. "Three cheers for Admiral Greenbeard!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!" Echoes beat against the distant rumble of surf. The little round pirates swarmed closer, drawing to a disorderly halt as they neared their chief.

"Aha, me hearties!" cried Alex. "This is a great day for the Brethren of the Coast. I've got none less than Alexander Jones, the plenipotentiary of Toka, here, and I'm about to spit him like a squab!" He paused. "What, no cheers?"

The pirates shuffled their feet.

"What?" bellowed Alex. "Speak up, you swabs. What's wrong?"

"Stab me!" mumbled Hook. "But it don't seem right to spit the plenipotentiary. After all he done for this planet."

Alex felt touched, but redoubled the ferocity of his glare.

"If it's glory you're after, Admiral," contributed Captain Kidd, "blast me if I'd waste time on the plenipotentiary. There's no glory to be gained by spitting him. Why, he's so feeble, they say he has to have a special chair to carry him around."

This description of the one small luxury Alex had purchased for himself after three years of saving — a robot chair for his office — so infuriated him that he lost his temper completely.

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"Is that so!" he yelled. "Well, it just happens that he's challenged me to a duel to the death, and I'm not going to back out. And you scuts will stay there and watch me kill him and like it!"

"No, I won't have it," cried a soldier, raising his musket. Olaf took it away from him, tied it in a knot, and gave it back.

Alex ducked inside the portal, where Tanni and the mayor waited in the garden, still muttering furiously. "What's wrong now, dear?" asked the girl, white-faced.

"Blankety-blanks," snarled Alex. "For two cents I'd kill myself, and then see how they like it!" He stamped over to a large brass urn he had placed in readiness.

"*En garde!*" he roared, fetching it a lusty swipe with his cutlass. "Take that!"

The gathered pirates jumped nervously. Billy Bosun tried to go through the gateway to see what was happening, but Olaf picked him up and threw him over the heads of Henry Morgan and One-Eye. "Private matter," said the viking imperturbably.

Viciously, Alex battered the clamoring urn with his blade, meanwhile yelling imprecations. "Don't try to get away! Stand and fight like a man! Aha! Take that, me hearty!"

Hammering away, he fumbled in his pocket with his free hand and brought out some ammonia-soaked cotton. The beard came loose and he gave it to Tanni, who was dabbing him with ketchup here and there, as he shouted in a slightly lower pitch.

"Is that so? Take that yourself!, And that, Greenbeard! Didn't know, did you —" he thrust his clean-shaven face around the edge of the gate — "that I was on the fencing team as a boy?"

Impulsively, the pirates cheered.

"As well," said Alex, circling back out of view and belaboring the urn, "as having my letter in track and swimming. I could have made the basketball team too, if I'd wanted. Take that!"

Hurriedly, he stuck the beard back on and signaled for more ketchup.

"Burn and blister me!" he swore, backing a little ways out of the gate and scowling horribly at the buccaneers, "but you've a tricky way about you, Jones. But it won't save you. The minute I trap you in a corner, I'll rip you up for bait. Take that!" He stepped out of sight again. "Ouch!" he cried in the lower voice.

The pirates looked sad. "It don't seem right," muttered Long John Silver. "It just never occurred to me that people might get hurt."

Captain Hook winced at the din. "Aye," he said shakily. "What've we gotten ourselves into, mates?"

"Don't be too cocky, Greenbeard!" cried Alex, appearing with a bare chin and lunging while Tanni struck the urn. "Actually, I've got

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muscles of steel. Take that! And that! And that!"

Vanishing again, he fetched the urn three ringing blows, dropped his cutlass, and clapped the beard back onto his face, giving vent to a spine-freezing scream.

"You got me!" he yammered. Clasping ketchup-soaked hands over his heart, he reeled across the gateway, stopping before the terrified visages of the pirates.

"Oh," he groaned. "I'm done for, mates. Spitted in fair and equal combat. Who'd'a thought the plenipotentiary was such a fighter? Goodby, mates. Clear sailing. Anchors away. Don't look for my body. Just let me crawl off and die in peace."

"Goodby," wept Anne Bonney, waving a handkerchief at him. The whole buccaneer band was dissolving into tears.

Alex staggered out of sight, removed his beard, and breathed heavily for a while. Then he picked up his cutlass and strode slowly out the gate and looked over his erstwhile followers.

"Well, well," he said scornfully. "What have we here? Pirates?"

There was a pause.

"Mercy, sir!" blubbered Captain Hook, falling to his knees before the conqueror of the terrible, the invincible, the indispensable Greenbeard, "We was just having our bit of fun, sir."

"We didn't mean nothing," pleaded Flint.

"We didn't figure to get nobody hurt," said Billy Bosun.

"Silence!" commanded Alex. "Do you give up?" There was no need to wait for an answer. "Very well. Mister Mayor, you will have these miscreants hanged at dawn. Then put them on their ships and let them go. And see that you behave yourselves hereafter!"

"Y-y-y-yes, sir," said Black Tom Yardly.

"Oh . . . I don't know," said the mayor. Wistfulness edged his tone. "They weren't so bad, now were they, sir? I think we owe 'em a vote of thanks, damme. These colonial outposts get infernally dull."

"Why, thank'ee, mayor," said Anne Bonney. "We'll come sack you anytime."

Alex interrupted hastily. Piracy seemed to have become an incurable disease, but if you can't change a Hoka's ways you can at least make him listen to reason . . . on his own terms.

"Now hear this," he decreed loudly. "I'm going to temper justice with mercy. The Brethren of the Coast may sack Bermuda once a year, but there must be no fighting —"

"Why should there be?" asked the mayor, surprised.

"— and the loot must be returned undamaged."

"Slice and kipper me!" exclaimed Captain Hook indignantly. "Of course it'll be returned, sir. What d'ye think we are — thieves?"

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Festivities lasted through all the next day, for the pirates, of course, had to sail away into the sunset. Standing on a terrace of the palace garden, his arm about Tanni and the mayor nearby, Alex watched their masts slip over the horizon.

"I've got just one problem left," he said. "Olaf. The poor fellow is still hanging around, trying to find someone who knows the way to Constantinople. I wish I could help."

"Why, that's easy, sir," said the mayor. "Constantinople is only about fifty miles due south of here."

"What?" exclaimed Alex. "No, you're crazy. That's the Kingdom of Natchalu."

"It was," nodded the mayor. "Right up till last month it was. But the queen is a lusty wench, if you'll pardon the expression, madam, and was finding life rather dull till a trader sold her some books which mentioned a, hm," the mayor coughed delicately, "lady named Theodora. They're still getting reorganized, but it's going fast and —"

Alex set off at a run. He rounded the corner of the house and the setting sun blazed in his eyes. It gilded the helmet and byrnie of Olaf Button-nose where he leaned on his sword gazing out to sea.

"Olaf!" cried Alex.

The Hoka viking turned slowly to regard the human. In the sunset, above the droop of his long blond mustaches, his face seemed to hold a certain Varangian indomitability.

The Doctrine of Original Design

If robots are delinquent in link effect and cause,
Blame it on Science — their defiance is pretense.
Now reread Monsieur Rousseau,
And how the AC-DC's flow,
Repairing faulty circuits of original design,
Think about their sleazy, spliced-up heads.

The missing links, mistreated, plead for modern monster laws;
Policemen trained politely, nice rules rightly could adminster
With hints and thanks and frank incense.
Remember Doctor Frankenstein,
Repeating in a chorus, "There are no bad monsters!
These are only crazy,
mixed-up,
kids!"

WINONA MCCLINTIC

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Millennium

by FREDRIC BROWN

HADES WAS HELL, SATAN THOUGHT; that was why he loved the place. He leaned forward across his gleaming desk and flicked the switch of the intercom.

"Yes, Sire," said the voice of Lilith, his secretary.

"How many today?"

"Four of them. Shall I send one of them in?"

"Yes — wait. Any of them look as though he might be an unselfish one?"

"One of them does, I think. But so what, Sire? There's one chance in billions of his making The Ultimate Wish."

Even at the *sound* of those last words Satan shivered despite the heat. It was his most constant, almost his only worry that someday someone might make The Ultimate Wish, the ultimate, *unselfish* wish. And then it would happen; Satan would find himself chained for a thousand years, and out of business for the rest of eternity after that.

But Lilith was right, he told himself.

Only about one person out of a thousand sold his soul for the granting of even a minor unselfish wish, and it might be millions of years yet, or forever, before the ultimate one was made. Thus far, no one had even come close to it.

"Okay, Lil," he said. "Just the same, send him in first; I'd rather get it over with." He flicked off the intercom.

The little man who came through the big doorway certainly didn't look dangerous; he looked plain scared.

Satan frowned at him. "You know the terms?"

"Yes," said the little man. "At least, I think I do. In exchange for your granting any one wish I make, you get my soul when I die. Is that right?"

"Right. Your wish?"

"Well," said the little man, "I've thought it out pretty carefully and —"

"Get to the point. I'm busy. Your wish?"

"Well . . . I wish that, without any change whatsoever in myself, I become the most evil, stupid and miserable person on earth."

Satan screamed.

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John Anthony, pseudonym of a well-known poet, professor and publisher (and can I help it if the facts are so alliterative?), made one of F&SF's most successful debuts with his hauntingly memorable The Hypnoglyph *(July, 1953), which ranked high among your votes for top story of the year and was promptly reprinted in August Derleth's selection of 1953's best,* PORTALS OF TOMORROW. *Now Mr. Anthony, who describes himself as "a one-story-a-year man, when the mood hits," returns to our pages with another quietly moving piece, which demonstrates how a poet may violate the Asimov Laws of Robotics . . . and thereby pose an ageless question concerning man himself.*

The Bone That Seeks

by JOHN ANTHONY

"BUT IT'S UNTHINKABLE," INSPECTOR Aa said. "How could it refuse?"

Resident Superintendent Jonz leaned back in his chair and waved his hand in the direction of the file lying on the desk before him. "My guess is . . ."

"Guess!" the Inspector snorted. "Are you in charge here to make guesses or to produce facts?"

Jonz spoke as he opened a desk drawer and drew out an envelope. "The fact that I have produced is that it does in fact refuse," he said. "After a fact, I have been trained to believe, come the questions of interpretation and evaluation." He tossed the envelope on the desk. "My resignation."

The Inspector swept his arm sidewise through the air as if to wave the resignation into oblivion. "Damn it, Jonz," he said dramatically, "stop being dramatic. So I'm foul-tempered Aa. So I blew off. So you knew I would and had your resignation all written out in advance. So now I apologize — is that what you want?"

Jonz smiled. "You only act like an atavism; you certainly don't think like one. I guess it's my turn to apologize."

"Some day, Jonz," the Inspector said evenly, "I certainly will fire you."

Jonz sat looking at the envelope. "You know," he said, "that's really it. I don't really care." He flipped his wrist and the envelope slid into

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the disposal chute. "We're old, Aa," he said. "We're terribly old."

The Inspector rose from his chair with a jerk and strode to the window. "Speak for yourself," he said, his back to the room. "I have too much work to do to get old.

"Work," he continued turning around. "Keeping your mind interested. Keeping yourself alive. Take it for a prescription, Jonz: you'll feel better." Suddenly he returned to his chair and sat down. "All right, let's get on with it." His voice was efficient and decisive. "You were guessing when I broke in."

Jonz nodded. "My guess is that he's tired."

The Inspector kept his tone sharp and his voice down. "You are asking me to believe in a tired robot?"

"Not just *a* robot," Jonz said. "Number One. Original everlasting Number One."

"That," said the Inspector, "is precisely why I am here. You may have overlooked the fact in your self-declared senility, but in one more decade Gov Centr will be a million years old."

"Nine hundred eleven thousand one hundred and forty two," Jonz said.

The Inspector, his hand still gesturing, let it hang in surprise for a moment and then fall slowly. "How do you come by that figure?"

"Number One gave it to me."

"Great Stars!" the Inspector said, "does its memory bank go back that far? Our records —"

"— were recalculated in the year 204,366 after the Last Destruction. Some errors were inevitable."

The Inspector's voice was almost a whisper. "It told you that, too?"

Jonz nodded. "We are just checking the final report to submit to you."

The Inspector spoke slowly. "And does your report say how far back Number One's memory banks were stored?"

"With certain gaps due to primitive surveying techniques, they go back," Jonz said emphasizing his words carefully, "to The Beginning. Number One itself was constructed nine hundred eighty thousand seven hundred and two years ago."

"But that's impossible."

Jonz shrugged. "Its circuits check perfectly against the Master Calculator," he said.

"By all the archaic gods!" the Inspector bellowed leaping to his feet. "And you mean to tell me that none of this information is yet on file?"

"The file will be completed in a matter of hours."

"Complete or incomplete," the Inspector shouted waving one arm in his favorite gesture of obliteration, "you mean to tell me that with the million year ceremony already in preparation, that this — this phenomenon, this milestone, this symbol of civilization, this achievement as ancient as the Pyramid Stone — this refuses to be reconditioned?"

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Jonz remained calm. "One thing at a time," he said. "As noted, it is not accurately a million years."

"A symbol," the Inspector barked, waving aside the difference. "In the imagination it all comes to one."

"In the second place," Jonz continued, "the Pyramid Stone — which incidentally Number One informs me was once part of a structure at least 200 feet high — predates Number One by precisely . . ." Jonz flipped a switch, punched the index code, and read the moving strip that was projected onto his desk plate. ". . . nine thousand three hundred and twelve years counting to the time at which its circuits were first energized."

"And in the third place?" the Inspector said.

"In the third place, it does in fact refuse to be reconditioned."

The Inspector exhaled a single word. "Why?"

"Because," Jonz said, "I think he . . . it wants to die."

This time the Inspector did not blow up. Instead he sat down with ponderous care and spoke in a quiet, measured voice as if containing himself only with the greatest effort. "To summarize," he said: "I am first asked to believe in a tired robot. I am then asked to believe in a metallic death wish. I will now be patient, holding back my incredulity as far as possible, and I will try to listen while you explain these fantastic statements. I ask you, however, to remember that I have my own superiors to report to, and that not even our long friendship can possibly alter an impartial statement of the facts as observed and checked."

Jonz did not even shrug away the threat. "A duplicate of my resignation is at your disposal," he said.

"Proceed," said the Inspector.

"I believe he wants to die, not part by part, but as an entity. These are largely his own words and are part of the record he has just made of his memory banks and his synthesizing circuits. The exact words are . . ." Jonz punched the index code again and read through the desk top: ". . . I record these data because my entity is tired. The wish that comes to me speaks in old words from the earliest impulse banks. I wish to go into the twilight and become the night. I am not certain I understand these words but I understand what is felt by them." Jonz stopped the film and looked up.

"A robot said that?" the Inspector asked.

"Number One said it," Jonz corrected.

"Do you imply that Number One is not a robot?"

"Within your symbolic million years many things can happen. Remember that Number One has been functioning continuously for longer than Gov Centr. To be sure every individual part of him has been reserviced and replaced so many countless times that it could only be

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by luck that he contains any of his original atoms. Nevertheless, since he is self-servicing, his original entity has existed without interruption, not even time for sleep, for almost your million years. Just as you and I, for example, have sloughed off and replaced all our cells many times while continuing to function as entities."

The Inspector squirmed in his chair as if about to erupt again, then set himself forcibly to being calm. "Doesn't it strike you that such an analysis is against the nature of its possibilities?"

"I suppose," Jonz answered, "that you might also say that intelligence is against the nature of the ameba's possibilities; it is merely sentient. And yet it is obvious that intelligence did develop with the ameba or something like it as a starting point. If intelligence was not within its nature, it was certainly within the possibility of its development."

"Which covered not one million years, but hundreds of millions, we need add."

"Certainly. But we need also add that Number One started on a much higher order of sentience than did the ameba. Can you insist that, given almost a million years, the development of a self-determining entity was not within his range of possibility?"

The Inspector leaned forward and slapped the desk with the flat of his palm. "I do. I do exactly that. The ameba began with self-determination. Number One began with only defined and externally set impulses."

"And has obviously developed beyond them into self-determination. Do we know exactly how life went from sentience to intelligence? But it did. And so has Number One."

"And has now developed into an entity capable of a death wish despite the original channels that inhibit it from harming itself?"

"I believe so."

The Inspector frowned. "Very well," he said. "Bring it in." He sat back to wait.

Jonz smiled. "I'm sorry," he said, "but he won't come."

The Inspector uncrossed his legs. "It won't what!"

"He has announced that he has retired to meditation and will no longer be available for service."

The Inspector rose to his feet. "I must say this is going to look strange on the report, Jonz. Despite your joking I may even be forced to call for the resignation you seem to be so free with. I should regret that." He looked straight at Jonz and his tone grew ironic. "And now can you tell me whether or not this tin philosopher of yours would consent to receive guests?"

"I think he will see you if you insist," Jonz said rising.

"I rather think I do," the Inspector said.

Number One was sitting in the shade of an evergreen maple about

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a hundred yards from the administration building when Inspector Aa and Resident Superintendent Jonz found him. Number One was leaning back against the trunk filling the air with slow sad oboe music from somewhere in his vibrobanks. When the Inspector and the Superintendent approached, Number One did not move and made no sign of recognition, but the sound of the oboe shut itself off.

"One," said Superintendent Jonz, "I have brought Inspector Aa. He wishes to speak to you."

"I am happy to see Inspector Aa again," One said. "I have signaled the service robots to bring you chairs. Is there anything else you wish?"

The service robots placed the chairs and sped back at a wave of Jonz's hand.

"Thank you," the Inspector said when seated, "but in future when I have a wish — an order to give you, I will make it known without invitation." He looked over at the Superintendent and then back to Number One. "What was that you were playing when we approached?"

"An exercise in transposition," Number One said. "Or hardly an exercise — a reverie around a theme from an ancient piano concerto by a composer named Brms or Brahms. I was rescoring the secondary theme of the second movement from piano to oboe. It does not work well, but the fullness of the woodwind tone seemed to entertain my mood."

The Inspector looked from One to Jonz and then back. "You are on service call, are you not?"

One's unblinking eyes turned to the Inspector. "Yes."

"And you refused to come when summoned?"

"I was not summoned."

"But you have refused in the past."

"Yes."

"Why have you refused?"

Number One looked outward across the grassy park and beyond to the great massed cumuli that shone faintly pink on the horizon. "I am that I am," the voice said at last.

"What?" the Inspector said.

"I am that I am," the robot repeated. "The words of an ancient book. Perhaps of an ancient god. I have no other thing to be than what I am, and I see that I am nothing. And still I must be nothing."

"Resident Superintendent Jonz," the Inspector said officially, "the circuits of this mechanism are obviously malfunctioning. You are ordered to see that they are checked at once."

Jonz remained silent and Number One spoke. "The circuits of this mechanism are no longer within the capacity of Resident Superintendent Jonz to check."

"You are self-servicing, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I order you to check and service your circuits."

Number One stared off again at

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the cloudbank. "The responses you object to are not in the circuits."

"Where are they then?"

One did not shift his gaze. "I do not know."

"Number One," Jonz said, "the Inspector is concerned about your actions. You are aware of course that Gov Centr is soon to celebrate its millionth anniversary."

"Its nine hundred eleven thousand one hundred —"

"Yes," Jonz interrupted. "We know. Nevertheless, until you informed me, the error was not known. It was believed to be the millionth. For all symbolic purposes it is as good as the millionth."

"Yes, I understand," Number One said. "A few years, many years. It cannot matter."

"Number One," said the Inspector, "why did you not report this error earlier?"

Number One held up a steel hand, the triple claws extended like fingers, and stared at them. "I had never been asked. I had not thought to activate those particular banks before."

"And why did you activate them?" the Inspector said.

Number One looked at the hand as if incredulously, then at the Inspector, then back to the hand. "I do not know." The voice was far away. "I did not think of it. I did not desire it. I simply found that they had been activated. It was as if a memory had come to me of itself."

"A memory," the Inspector said, his voice heavy with sarcasm. "Of young love perhaps?"

"No, not of young love."

"Then what memory?"

"A simple memory of simple words. A memory that said, *I am that I am.*"

"And for this you refuse to service yourself?"

"Yes," Number One said. "For this. And because there is that which cannot be serviced."

Jonz spoke again. "One," he said, "the Inspector is concerned about the millionth anniversary. You can see how important your presence will be at the ceremonies. Think how many generations of men have come and gone in that million years. But Gov Centr has stood through them all, and you, Number One, have stood through them all. You are a symbol, One. We need you not only to serve, but to teach us who we are and by what way we have come."

The Inspector snorted. "I doubt that we will require more than your services. I believe we are capable of assuring ourselves who we are."

Number One did not move. "What is in my banks I have recorded. What remains that is not in my banks I know now I cannot synthe — understand. I am that I am, and I can perform no more service."

"You are part of the everlasting record of Gov Centr," said the Inspector firmly. "It is fitting that

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you be there. You must be there."

"Everlasting," Number One said softly, leaning quietly back against the tree, head back a little, eyes turned to the darkening cloud bank. The voice spoke as if to itself:

In my stone eye I see
The saint upon his knee
Delve in the desert for eternity.

"What on earth is that?" said the Inspector.

Number One did not answer. The voice went on as if in utter privacy:

In my stone ear I hear
The night-lost traveler
Cry "When?" to the earth's shadow.
"When? Oh, where?"

"It's a poem," Jonz said. "A poem called "What Riddle Asked the Sphinx?" by an ancient poet named Achbld McLsh."

Number One's voice went on as if aware of nothing else:

Stone deaf and blind
I ponder in my mind
The bone that seeks, the flesh that cannot find.

Suddenly Number One stopped, eyes still fixed on the cumulus bank as if lost in reverie. The clouds had become touched with violet.

The Inspector turned to Jonz, his voice nasty and ironic. "I hadn't known you had taken to reading poetry. Have you other atavisms?"

"That's two questions," Jonz answered softly. "As far as atavisms are concerned, yes, I suppose I have discovered many within myself. As for reading poetry — I don't know how. The words, yes. But the rhythms I cannot find unaided. It was Number One who taught me."

The Inspector almost sneered openly. "Taught poetry by a robot. Well, I can promise that it will teach you no more of it."

Jonz's voice did not lose its softness. "Yes, I believe you can: he's dead."

"It's what?"

"He," Jonz repeated, "is dead." His hand motioned toward Number One as if to say *see for yourself.*

The Inspector barked a command and got no response. Then he leaned over and jabbed the emergency activator button. Still no response.

He straightened slowly and signaled a service robot. "For laboratory examination," he said when the robot raced up. The robot lifted Number One and sped away. The Inspector stood looking after it.

"For laboratory examination," Jonz said with a wry smile. "A million years on the spare parts bench. What do you think you'll find, Inspector?"

The Inspector turned angrily. "Maybe we can coax his memory back to finish that poem for you. You would like to know the end, wouldn't you, Superintendent." He pronounced the word *Superintendent* as if it were an epithet.

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Jonz's voice was calm and even. "I do know the end, Inspector." Jonz carefully refrained from placing any emphasis whatever on the title. "Number One taught it to me some time ago. The last stanza is a magnificent one:

To all who ken or can
I ask since time began
What riddle is it has for answer,
Man?"

"Jonz," the Inspector said, "you told me you were getting old."

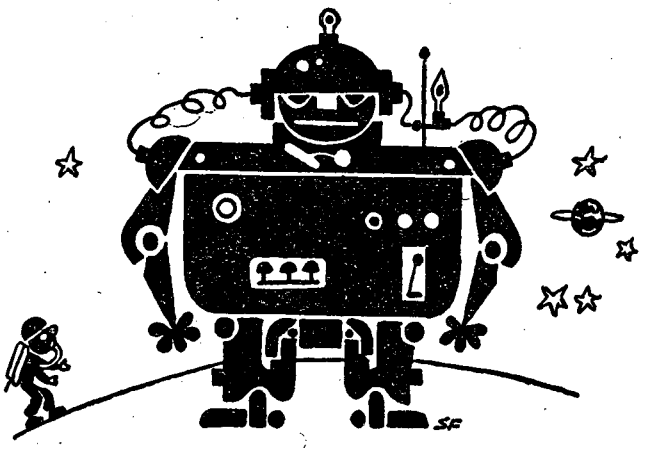
"Terribly old," Jonz said. "Both of us. All of us."

He nodded sadly.

"And I told you to speak for yourself. I," the Inspector said, "still have work to do. My first job is to accept your resignation."

Jonz signaled the service robots to remove the chairs and sat down under the tree. He nodded, half-smiling. "Would you mind looking for it in my desk? I'd like to sit here for a while and watch those clouds go dark."

The poem "What Riddle Asked the Sphinx?" from Archibald MacLeish's "Collected Poems" (Houghton-Mifflin) is reprinted by permission of Archibald MacLeish.



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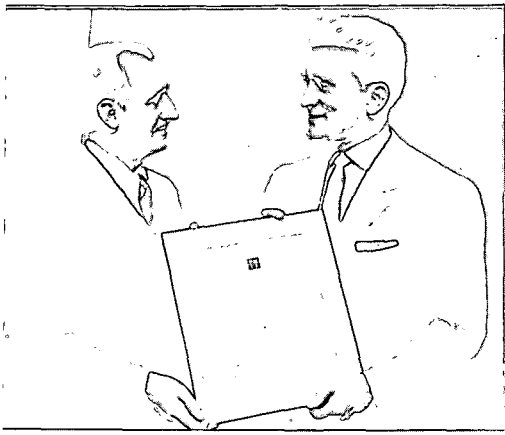
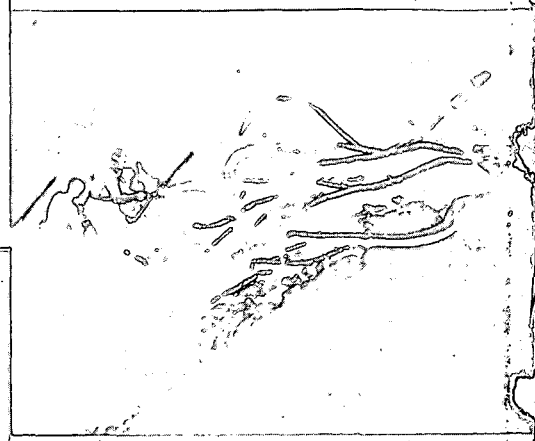
Joseph W. Ferman, publisher of F&SF presenting award to Kirk Douglas. Other photographs show a scene from the film "TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA," and a copy of the award scroll given Mr. Douglas.





THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION *has presented an award to Kirk Douglas for his fine work in Walt Disney's film version of Jules Verne's "*TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA.*" Jules Verne is, of course, the father of modern science fiction, and* F&SF *wishes to offer its warm congratulations on this artistic tribute to Verne's genius.*

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction presents this award to **KIRK DOUGLAS** *for his outstanding performance in Jules Verne's* 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, *and in recognition of his contribution in this splendid re-creation by Walt Disney of a masterpiece of creative imagination and scientific foresight by the father of modern science fiction.*

New York, December 7, 1954

J. W. Ferman PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher* EDITOR

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